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The IDLE BORN

by

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR



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THE IDLE BORN

THE IDLE BORN

A COMEDY OF MANNERS

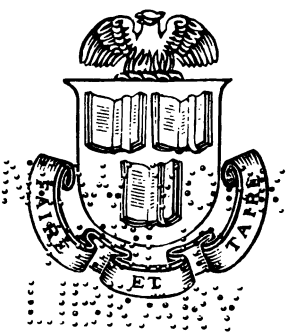
BY

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR

Author of "Two Women and a Fool," "The Land of the Castanet," "The Vice of Fools," "An American Peeress," etc.

IN COLLABORATION WITH

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A HOMILY

When Isaac Watts wrote his time-worn lines about the mischief Satan finds for idle hands he perhaps found his inspiration in the "smart society" of the day. Certainly the courts of the Restoration and George the First presented a spectacle of depravity which might even shock a far more liberal-minded person than a non-conformist minister.

The point of view, however, of the author of Psalms and Hymns must have been restricted by his opportunities. The Sabbath lighting of Whitehall, and the sounding of the tabors for the weekly "brawl," or a boyish glimpse through the trees of Bird Cage walk of the Merry Monarch romping with his spaniels and greyhounds and followed

Baker, Taylor, H. 3½, *.90

apace by a bevy of laughing beauties, whose reputations were as highly colored as their cheeks, may have been sufficient to impress the mind of the youthful Puritan with the shallowness of Vanity Fair. Or, again, when grown to manhood, the pastor of Mark Lane may have received his impressions of the gross and vulgar Hanoverian court while passing in his humble wanderings the country drive, called Hyde Park, where the ladies drove round and round in a cloud of dust, singing, laughing, tickling each other and munching cheese cakes and China oranges. He might even have sauntered to the river side, and beheld a royal barge with its rowers in scarlet jackets, bearing a party of pleasure-seeking dames and attendant Macaronis to Marble Hill or Twickingham. A glimpse only of gay, laughing ladies in slouch hats and falling mantles, of gentlemen in puce-colored coats, with cocked hats, and old point

lace dark as coffee water could make it; but enough to cause the good man to shudder and offer a prayer for the souls of the idle born.

Of the lives of those fine people—of their evil ways—the Rev. Issac Watts could know but little, except as the scandals of the court were whispered in distorted form, from mouth to mouth, or pointed by innuendo in the pages of the Tatler.

Society then was the court, and the court was to all intents and purposes the government. The chief mischief provided by Satan for the idle was the means to barter place and emolument, the power to injure their fellow men. People have not changed appreciably since then, for human nature alters little, but in the never ending conflict between the powers of good and evil the good is slowly but surely advancing, and were Isaac Watts to return to earth to-day he would find many changes

since he retired from the whirl of London town to the quiet of Theobold's Newington. There are still good men to pray for the souls of the idle born,—but the gay and frivolous have been shorn of their power. A Chesterfield may still loiter over the tea cups in my lady's drawing-room, or a Marlborough fight for his country in foreign lands, but the class to which Isaac Watts belonged—the Commoners of England, the people of America—are now the power which governs. Ruling only itself, society has sunk to the position of the court of a Bourbon Pretender. It keeps up its forms and pretenses; it bows and scrapes, while the world moves on, turning, perchance, to laugh or point a moral.

Shorn of its laces and tambour work, its cocked hats and gossamer stockings, society becomes a somewhat shoddy manikin, with little distinction and less romance. There is much in the age and

the opportunity. When Lady Shrewsbury disguises herself as a page and holds her lover's horse while he runs her husband through the heart, it is romance. When Mrs. Van Cortland Street divorces her husband to-day and marries some nincompoop to-morrow, it is merely rot—used in the sense of corruption and decay. The morality in both instances is much the same, with the advantage for the modern husband—if it be an advantage—that his heart remains physically intact.

Nothing, however, is all bad. Even society has its reason for existing, best summed up in the nursery saw that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." When society becomes the playground for the statesman, the writer and the painter—when amid the lights and the prattle there is an occasional breathing spell for the idle to stop and listen to the words of intellect and profit thereby, then society fulfills a

useful purpose. In the days of Isaac Watts the idle born were depraved, more so, no doubt, than we of to-day, but they wrote verses which were creditable and letters which were readable, and vied with each other in sallies of wit and repartee. There was Halifax to play Mæcenas and Addison to profit thereby; there was Pope to write verses to "Wortley's Eyes," and Lady Mary herself to love and quarrel with and make the twisted little poet confess that she and languid Hervey had too much wit even for him. To be sure, we have our poets in society to-day, but they are managed by lecture bureaus, and when they write verses to "Wortley's" or anybody's eyes, the copyright is carefully secured on both sides of the Atlantic.

If the idle no longer vie with each other in making verses, a new ambition, typical of the day, has arisen. It is to lead in extravagance. To be extrava-

gant one must be rich, and thus money has become the "open sesame" and wit has been driven to the wall. Society naturally has suffered—not in morality, perhaps, but in distinction—and with the new ambition, the attendant vices of envy and malice have come to the fore. This may be dangerously near preaching—and there is an old proverb about people who live in glass houses—but, even at the risk of having the stones hurled back with redoubled fury, one cannot help wishing that those of us who waste our time amid the prattle and the lights of modern life might have a little more charity for each other; might strive for some better end than to outdo our neighbors in extravagance; might realize that women should be judged by some higher standard than their wardrobes—men by some finer attribute than a bank account. One can't help thinking that the modern world of fashion—with its splendid trappings and

its clink of gold—is, after all, a tawdry little sham, where the finer sentiments are crushed, and the all-pervading spirit is extravagance. Perhaps we are no better—let us hope we are no worse—than the idle born of other days; but what do we amount to after all? The world moves on without us, while good men like Isaac Watts silently pray for our betterment.

The story of The Idle Born which follows is a satire of this little world of fashion. The canvas is small because the people are small. If the talk is fatuous, and the actions at times contemptible, it is because to be straightforward and outspoken is to be serious, and that is fatal in society.

Perhaps Lord Chesterfield was right when he said to his son: "Throw away none of your time upon those trivial futile books published by idle, necessitous authors, for the amusement of idle and ignorant readers." How-

ever, the life of the idle exists; it is shallow and petty, no doubt, but in its present form it is a product of the times. If Beau Nash no longer rides Godiva-like upon a cow his prototype does some equally foolish thing; if there is no longer a King of Bath, to decree that the music of the Pump-room shall stop at eleven, there are kings and queens of other places to keep it going until dawn, and "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

H. C. C-T.



PART I

ONE EVENING

THE IDLE BORN

I

They are so linked in friendship.

—*Henry VI.*

Double drawing-rooms, with stiff-backed chairs and damask curtains, were not to Dickie Willing's taste. They might be the natural concomitants of Washington Square and a Dutch ancestry, but in his opinion they were decidedly out of date.

"If there's a dinner on, we'll wait," he said, glancing about the room with a bored air.

"There's only Mr. Schuyler's nephew, sir, and Mr. Wendell," answered the imperturbable servant who had shown him in.

"Then say that Herr von Bulowitz

and Mr. Willing are here," Dickie continued, indifferently.

"Very good, sir," and the man vanished, just as a little red-faced German, with the proportions of a pegtop, stumbled over the door-sill, almost dropping a violin case he bore tenderly in his arms. He had little pig-like eyes and his hair was gray and fluffy, like the wool of a Peruvian llama. This hair was the *maestro's* stock-in-trade. It was that people came to see. Incidentally, he played the violin.

Herr von Bulowitz shivered. "The climate is like the New York woman," he muttered, "beautiful, but damn cold."

"Therein it resembles your audiences," answered Dickie, laconically. Then his eye met the portrait of a fat-faced burgher of New Amsterdam hanging over the mantelpiece. He wondered whether the painting was real or merely the imagery of the special vintage he had drunk for dinner.

"Sir, I am the great Von Bulowitz,"

said the little German, drawing himself up proudly. "The big public, they adore me; but society—bah!"

"See here," interrupted Willing, "I've got you a cool five hundred for to-night; so the less you kick about it the better. You may think it's your playing people want. Don't fool yourself; it's your hair."

"Gott im Himmel, so! I vill not play," exclaimed Von Bulowitz, the color of his face changing from carnelian to carmine.

"Oh, yes you will," answered Dickie, dryly; "you wouldn't let that five hundred get away."

For a moment the little Teuton paced the floor excitedly, muttering German oaths; then he subsided into an armchair and hugged his violin. Meanwhile, Dickie Willing gazed at his own reflection in the pier-glass. There was, however, little reason for his self-appreciation beyond the fit of his clothes and the smoothness with which his hair was brushed. Dickie lived by his wits,

and lived well. Once he had had some money. That he lost it is not surprising, but that he managed to make himself indispensable to society as a purveyor of entertainments, without losing caste, proved that he had that rare tact which creates popularity for its possessor. When a hostess wished a novelty, were it cotillion favors or virtuosi, she went to Dickie, and Dickie was always ready to oblige her—at so much per idea.

Dickie, having adjusted his tie to his satisfaction, turned away from the glass with an air of self-contentment.

Then the dining-room doors were opened and Nicholas Schuyler entered the room. How rare his kind to-day!—a man of breeding, born to wear "the grand old name of gentleman," in quiet contrast to the vulgarity of modern life. Even Dickie realized the distinction that marked the bearing of this gray-haired representative of the old school.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, if I have

kept you waiting," Mr. Schuyler said, softly.

The little German jumped to his feet and bowed with exaggerated gesture.

"Sir, I am the great Von Bulowitz, I come so quick because, unless I fix myself just so, I cannot play. I am so sensitive as my violin."

"You honor me, sir, by playing in my house," answered the host, courteously. The great Von Bulowitz placed his hand to his heart and bowed again.

Two younger men had followed Nicholas Schuyler from the dining-room. One was Schuyler Ainslee, his nephew, a frank, careless young man of twenty-five or more, who had drifted through the world, accepting the good things of life as his due and overcoming the disagreeable by the exuberance of youthful spirits. The other was Norman Wendell, his most intimate friend—a young painter, in whose pale, delicate face was an expression of earnestness, a desire to conquer in the struggle with the world. The two were

friends because of their opposite natures, that were like positive and negative currents.

Dickie Willing did not notice the newcomers, but, drawing Mr. Schuyler aside, he whispered, confidentially:

"Awful cranks, these musical Johnnies. Had a devil of a time getting him here. Deserve some credit, what?"

"Take cash, Dickie. Nobody'd give you credit," laughed young Ainslee at his elbow.

"But don't take it all," put in Wendell. Leave some for Von Bulowitz."

"I say, fellows, don't chaff," protested Dickie. "Can't starve; got to work, you know."

"That's right, Dickie, work everybody you can," continued Ainslee, and he and Wendell smiled broadly at Dickie's discomfiture.

Mr. Schuyler gave his nephew a glance of disapproval, and turning to the musician, said, quietly, "I thought the back drawing-room would be the

best place for the music. You see, there'll only be a very few people."

"Vat! only a few peoples to hear me play?" protested the little German. "Me, the great Von Bulowitz!"

"You don't understand," said Dickie, hurriedly. "A few people are so much smarter."

"Yes," laughed Ainslee. "You see, the way to keep your social position in New York is to give a party and leave out half the people you know. Those who are there think they are society; those who are not immediately invite you, to prove they are not outsiders."

"Tut, tut, my boy," protested his uncle. "My house is small, but I'm old-fashioned. I hold to the old ways. Give me New York as it was."

"And give me New York as it is, with all its glitter and bigness," exclaimed the nephew. "Give me the millionaires, too, with their vulgar wealth—they know how to spend it; give me the women—heartless if you like—they know how to make them-

selves attractive. I am modern to my finger tips, and proud of it."

"What heresy!" exclaimed Mr. Schuyler, in disgust. "It's enough to make your ancestors turn in their graves."

"Yes? Well, it won't hurt them to move a little," replied young Ainslee, glancing patronizingly at the portraits on the walls.

"Come, Herr von Bulowitz," said Nicholas Schuyler, turning away. "My nephew is incorrigible. It's the Ainslee blood. His father wasn't one of us."

The German shrugged his shoulders, because he did not understand, and the old Knickerbocker, glancing at Wendell in despair as he walked away, said, pleadingly, "Why don't you persuade Schuyler to marry? That would be his salvation."

"Ainslee married!" chuckled Dickie Willing. "Ha! Rather neat, what?" But, as nobody seemed to notice him, he meekly followed Mr. Schuyler and the musician to the other room.

The two friends were left alone.

Wendell looked at his companion searchingly. Ainslee had a manly face, with clear blue eyes and high cheek bones. His mouth was straight and determined. Wendell could not reconcile it with the carelessness of the man.

"Schuyler," he said, suddenly, "why do you throw your life away?"

Ainslee laughed. "What else is it good for?" he said.

"I wish I had half your chance," sighed Wendell.

"Humph!" grunted the other. "Suppose I should do something. In politics, I'd be a plutocrat; in literature, a dilettante, with more money than brains; in business, one more lamb to be fleeced. The world would never take me seriously."

"It will take you just as seriously as you take yourself," protested Wendell.

Ainslee glanced at his friend. "See here, old man," he said, after a moment, "because you paint bad pictures to sell to your friends, does it give you

the right to get up on a pedestal and preach?"

"I'm not preaching—I'm only advising you to go slow." Wendell said this quietly, without attempting to resent his companion's imputations.

"Oh, I know," answered Ainslee. "The pace that kills, and all that drivel. Well, what of it? I take the world as it comes, and a jolly good world I find it."

"And, meanwhile, Renée Dressler makes a fool of you."

"If she didn't, some other woman would."

"When inclination has made a fool, remorse will produce a cynic—which is only another name for a fool," said Wendell, dryly.

"Well, suppose I do play with Renée Dressler—is that any of your affair?" retorted Ainslee, rather angrily.

"Yes, when I am expected to play gooseberry."

Ainslee poked the fire. "Can't you paint the lady's portrait unless she sits

to you alone?" he answered, sneeringly. "Besides, the studio's half mine, anyway."

Wendell laughed. "Come, Schuyler," he replied, "do you think I can't see through your little game?"

Ainslee put down the poker and looked at his friend, "You fatigue me," he said. "Renée Dressler's no gosling—she can take care of herself."

"And you, too, for that matter, but——"

"Oh, there's a but, is there? Well, out with it."

Wendell paced the floor thoughtfully, then turning suddenly, he said, earnestly:

"Well, to be frank, I can't stand by quietly and see you treat Margaret Irvington as you do."

Ainslee laughed. "So that's where the shoe pinches," he said.

"Yes; it's a confounded shame," continued Wendell. "You have no right to let any girl think you're serious."

"What if I am?"

"You serious!" exclaimed Wendell, "when you are in love with Renée Dressler!"

Ainslee looked at him long and searchingly. "What if I were not?" he said, slowly. "What if I intend to marry Margaret Irvington—provided, of course, she'll have me; what then?"

"Well, God help her, that's all," said his companion.

"A nice sort of a friend you are!" exclaimed Ainslee, with a gesture of resentment.

"I'm too good a friend not to wish to spare you both inevitable misery."

For a moment Schuyler Ainslee gazed into the fire thoughtfully.

"She—she's different from other women," he said, finally. "She might make a man of me."

"Well, I'm the last man to judge you," replied the other, in a tone of despair.

Ainslee walked toward his friend quickly. "Norman, old chap," he said, placing his hand on his shoulder

and looking into his face searchingly, "I never thought of it before, but I believe you love Margaret yourself."

Wendell turned away. "Well, what if I do?" he said, shrugging his shoulders, resignedly.

"Have you told her?" Ainslee asked, after a moment's reflection.

"How could I? What has a poor devil like me to offer?"

"Then tell her. I've said nothing yet."

"Do—do you mean it?" Wendell exclaimed.

"Of course, I mean it. Can I stand in the way of a man like you? No. Go to her—tell her the truth. You—you—owe it to yourself, and to her."

Ainslee lighted a cigarette by way of disguising his feelings.

"And if I fail?" asked Wendell, slowly.

"Then it's my turn," said his friend, tossing the match into the fire. "If I didn't mean it, I'd say it was fair game."

"And if I succeed?" Wendell asked.

"Oh, I'll worry along," laughed Ainslee. "I won't die of the devils. I'm not that sort."

There was a moment of silence. Wendell paced the floor, counting mechanically the squares in the rug. Suddenly he stopped. "And if I lose, what then? What of the other woman?" he asked, anxiously.

"There won't be any," Ainslee replied, calmly sending a puff of blue smoke toward the ceiling. "Whatever happens, I'm going to quit right now." Then, with a laugh, he continued. "I'm going to pull down my French lithographs and hang up Madonnas."

"Are you serious?" his friend asked, in a tone of incredulity.

"Yes, perfectly—there's my hand on it."

The two men shook hands quietly as men do when they accept a wager, or part on the eve of a battle.

"Then let the best man win," said Wendell, after a moment's deliberation.

"It'll be you, old chap—I don't deserve her," answered his friend, cheerfully. Then he walked toward the fire and threw away his cigarette.

Nicholas Schuyler came into the room. He had left Von Bulowitz and Willing quarreling over the proper arrangement of the chairs.

"Well," he said to Wendell, "have you convinced Schuyler that life's not all beer and skittles?"

"No," said Wendell, sadly. "Schuyler has convinced me that appearances are sometimes deceptive." Then he wandered into the smoking-room. There are moments when a man wishes to be alone.

II

An enemy of craft and vantage.

—*Henry V.*

Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Dressler, familiarly known as "the Monties," were the first of Nicholas Schuyler's guests to materialize. They had been yawning by their own fireside for an hour or more in order that they might convey the impression of having dined out, but, unfortunately, miscalculating the distance from Fifty-fourth street to Washington Square by some fifteen minutes, they were mortified to find themselves the first arrivals.

"My dear lady," said the host, advancing to meet them, "it is so good of you to come early."

"Oh, it wasn't I," laughed Mrs. Dressler, "it was Monty, silly man. He said we'd never get here."

"Well, you can't blame me," said her

offending husband, suppressing a yawn. "Washington Square! Why, it's as far out of the world as the Bowery. Why don't you move uptown, Schuyler?"

"What!" gasped the courtly Knickerbocker. "Leave Washington Square —the last stand of the 'old guard' against Central Park and the millionaires! Never, sir, never!"

Fortunately the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Van Rensselaer Bleeker saved the situation, else Mr. Schuyler's indignation might have exceeded the bounds of politeness. As it was, he turned away from the young stockbroker abruptly, and with a very red face.

Monty Dressler winked at his wife. "Peppery old cock," he laughed. Mrs. Dressler did not reply. She was angry because Schuyler Ainslee had failed to see her. He was still gazing into the fire, lost in contemplation of the immediate future.

"Well, upon my word," she said to herself, "if he thinks he can treat me like that!"

Renée Dressler was a woman in whom sentiment was sterilized. She looked upon love much as a game of confidence into which men were to be deliberately decoyed by a few apparently successful wins, and then mercilessly robbed of their affections by the most subtle methods of scientific play. Her beauty was of a fleshly type, made stunning by wavy folds of Titian hair, and by deep brown eyes, that had a dreamy, mystical way of looking into men's souls; but her mouth was cold and hard—and a woman's mouth means everything. Men called her figure "divine," but as it was suggestive of most that is earthly, the heavenly attribute seemed ill-chosen. She was, nevertheless, a strikingly beautiful creature, perfectly groomed, and perfectly confident of her power to fascinate mankind.

As for "Monty" Dressler, people endured him because of his wife, and she endured him because of his complaisance. He had the single advan-

tage of being well born, if one can disassociate birth from breeding.

Mrs. Dressler took up a few photographs from the table and examined them abstractedly, meanwhile casting an occasional side glance in the direction of Schuyler Ainslee. Monty approached her quietly.

"There's Ainslee," he whispered. "He wants security for that loan, and I can't give it. Watch your chance and talk him over."

Even Renée Dressler was shocked at such brutal candor. "I've half a mind to tell him you never intend to pay," she answered, coldly.

"Well, I like that," sneered Monty. "Suppose I should play the injured husband?"

"At least I should be rid of you."

"Hush!" he whispered, "he's looking." Then he stole away quickly, while his wife arranged a bow of ribbons on her gown with apparent unconsciousness of Ainslee's approach.

Schuyler came toward her leisurely.

He had awakened from his revery, but his lack of eagerness to greet her annoyed her exceedingly.

"I wondered if you were going to speak to me," she said, resentfully, as he extended his hand.

"You may be surprised," he laughed, "but I was actually thinking."

"About me?"

"No, about matrimony."

"How very immoral!" she laughed, hiding her face behind her fan. Then they were interrupted by the arrival of the aggressive Mrs. Jones-Smythe and her simpering daughter, Mabel. Mrs. Jones-Smythe's voice was a bar to conversation in her immediate vicinity, so Schuyler and his companion sought refuge in a far-off corner.

"So good of you to come," said Mr. Schuyler, as he greeted the newcomers.

"And so good of you to ask us," answered Mrs. Jones-Smythe, with an *empressement* of manner that would have

done honor to the cook of a Grand Duchess. "Mabel adores music, don't you, dear?"

"Yes, mamma," replied the daughter, with a kittenish smile.

"You know Mabel plays Chopin charmingly," pursued the mother, much to the annoyance of her host, who had invited her only because the late Mr. Jones-Smythe had been his room-mate at college. "It will be such a treat for the dear child," she continued. "We gave up a dinner at Mrs. Egerton's so that she should not miss this lovely music."

"Mrs. Egerton's," grunted Monty Dressler to himself. "It's odds on she was never in the house. Wonder how she got here?"

At this moment the curtains separating the drawing-rooms were thrown back, disclosing the great Von Bulowitz in theatric pose.

Mrs. Jones-Smythe gasped with delight. "Oh, Mr. Dressler, do tell me," she said to the unfortunate Monty who

had not had time to escape, "is that Herr von Bulowitz?"

"Yes, that's his nibs, all right; Zulu hair and all."

Her red face assumed an expression of horror. "How can you be so disrespectful to art?" she protested.

"Because I bar a chap who won't get his hair cut."

"To me he is divine," she answered, so loudly that she might have been heard in Eighth street. Then, turning to her host, she continued: "Do introduce me to the *maestro*."

"With pleasure," murmured Mr. Schuyler, though the truth of his remark was questionable. So Mrs. Jones-Smythe swept proudly toward the great Von Bulowitz, her dress crackling at every step, and her daughter Mabel fluttering in her wake.

Meanwhile, Ainslee had been telling Renée Dressler, in a blunt, straightforward way, that he was weary of the life he had been leading, and could see nothing but misery if the false relation-

ship they had established should continue. He was ashamed of the part he had played, but so far it had been only a flirtation—thanks to her cleverness—with nothing serious to regret. He was too sincere not to explain the case frankly, and she was too confident of her own power to consider the situation dangerous. Men were always cautious when they were afraid—and to be afraid of her meant an unconditional surrender in the end, if the cards were properly played.

"So you're contemplating matrimony?" she said, with a cynical smile.

"Why not?" he answered.

"Humph! That's the way a stupid man always ends an affair. He marries some little minx to pet him and darn his stockings, and flatters himself he's virtuous—until he falls in love again."

Those deep, mysterious eyes forced a confession, even against his will. "Men love women like you in spite of themselves," he said, his voice trembling as he spoke.

"Until we're foolish enough to care," she laughed. "A man in love is like the baby in the advertisement—he won't be happy till he gets it."

"If I thought you had ever cared for ——"

"Of course," she answered, sarcastically, "a woman never cares; it's only men who are brave and self-sacrificing —only men who love."

Ainslee smiled. "Then you won't find it difficult to forget?"

"That will be the easiest part of it."

"Well, we've played the game," he sighed.

"And it wasn't worth the candle."

"Yes. If you weren't an American we'd have eloped long ago."

"I fail to see the point," she said, with a show of interest.

"For once you are dense. In Europe women have hearts; in America merely intellects."

She shrugged her pretty shoulders unconcernedly. "Well?" she said.

"I gave you the chance," he replied. "You remember my letter."

"I'm not a fool."

"The game is give and take—not solitaire."

"Patience is the game a man should play."

"Indeed!" he answered, coldly. "For me it must be all or nothing."

"Then marry your little minx," she said, with a gesture of indifference.

"Precisely what I intend to do," he replied, plunging his hands into his pockets and settling himself comfortably in his chair, as if a great weight had been lifted from his mind.

Renée glared at him angrily. "If you dare!" she said.

"Is that a challenge?" he asked, looking up at the ceiling with a forced endeavor to appear unconcerned. He was afraid to meet her eyes again, for fear of wavering.

"Yes, it is a challenge," she said, rising from her seat and carefully arrang-

ing the folds of her gown. "Go, if you wish—you'll be back in a week."

"Never," he cried.

"How absurd you are," she murmured. "Melodrama always did bore me."

She hummed a few bars of a popular song, while Ainslee glared at a spot on the rug.

"My fan, if you please," she said, finally, with a gesture toward the table. He handed her the fan. She took it carelessly and tapped her fingers with the mother-of-pearl handle.

"Schuyler," she said, suddenly.

"Yes."

"Women are curious creatures—we don't forget as easily as men do, and—and we usually get even in the end."

"Well?" he asked.

"Remember it, that's all," she purred. Then she walked toward the other drawing-room, where Von Bulowitz was tuning his violin amid the clatter of many voices. Ainslee plunged his hands into his pockets again and set his teeth.

Then he sighed and took a step toward the fire. "It's over," he thought, "for better or for worse."

Nicholas Schuyler, seeing Mrs. Dressler was alone, came toward her and offered his arm. "Permit me, my dear lady," he said, with old-time courtesy. Noticing his nephew, he continued, sharply, "Schuyler, where are your manners?"

"Gone to the devil with my morals," answered the young man gruffly.

"Poor boy, don't disturb him," interrupted Mrs. Dressler, pitingly; "he's contemplating matrimony."

Ainslee slammed the door of the smoking-room in a way that was expressive of his feelings.

"Why," exclaimed his uncle, in surprise, "I thought Schuyler was in love with you."

"With me?" she laughed. "Oh, dear, no; he's in love with himself."

III

We are the Queen's subjects, and must obey.
—*Richard III.*

A well-trained servant has a way of accentuating the importance of a guest by the precision with which the name is announced, therefore it was with particular emphasis that Mr. Schuyler's butler heralded the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Ferry Dobbs and Mr. Beacher.

"Ah," exclaimed the host, as he and Mrs. Dressler turned instinctively at the sound of the exalted names, "the queen of diamonds."

" Escorted, as usual, by the knave of hearts and the deuce of spades," said his companion *sotto voce*, as a blaze of feminine magnificence swept into the room, followed by the exquisite warden of her fan and scent-bottle and the humble bearer of her family burdens. The air of superiority assumed by Mrs. Ferry

Dobbs, on this and all occasions, was worthy of an empress; but an empress can afford to be modest and gracious because she is sure of her position. Not so with a queen of society in the borough of Manhattan; her motto is malice toward all, condescension to none. Some day the little world between Gramercy and Central Parks and thereabouts may discover that it is the heart and not the wardrobe that makes a woman, but meanwhile Mrs. Ferry Dobbs and her diamonds reign supreme, and the mammonites bow before their queen. Even the courtly Nicholas Schuyler beamed in the golden effulgence of her presence, and felt flattered in his inmost heart at this honor to his modest party.

"My dear Mrs. Dobbs," he said, with unfeigned eagerness, "I was so afraid you were not coming."

"Oh, really!" the queen replied, with a gesture toward the faithful Beacher. A jeweled scent-bottle was forthcoming, which she sniffed disdainfully.

"Yes," continued Mr. Schuyler; "you

know a party without you is like—is like —" and then he was lost for a simile.

Mrs. Dressler saw her opportunity. "A party without you, Mrs. Dobbs," she interrupted, suavely, "is like a watch without a mainspring—it won't go."

"Oh, really!" and Mrs. Dobbs actually smiled.

"Fancy a party without Mrs. Dobbs!" said Bertie Beacher, as he exchanged the royal smelling-bottle for the royal fan.

"Perhaps, Mr. Beacher, when you have time," suggested the host, "you will condescend to speak to me."

"Why, Schuyler, you there?" drawled Beacher. "Really, I didn't see you."

"Of course not; the host is the last person one notices nowadays."

This was too subtle for the intellect of Bertie Beacher. He had semi-annual importations of clothes from "the other side" and the preference of Mrs. Ferry Dobbs, and naturally mankind was envious; so Nicholas Schuyler's sarcasm was accepted as a flattering

demonstration of jealousy. However, Dickie Willing's arrival on the scene prevented further word-play. This personage had been holding Von Bulowitz in abeyance in the hope that Mrs. Ferry Dobbs, or, at least, Mrs. Egerton, would arrive and save the party from the taint of the Jones-Smythes.

"Oh, Mrs. Dobbs," he cried, with satisfaction, "I'm so glad you've come. Now the music can begin."

"Oh, really!" answered Mrs. Dobbs, wearily.

"Fancy music without Mrs. Dobbs," said Bertie Beacher, as he deferentially exchanged the royal fan for a pocket-handkerchief. Then, as there was a manifest pause in the edifying conversation, he addressed the host. "I say, Schuyler, when's the Johnny going to fiddle?"

"We are only waiting for Mrs. Dobbs," answered the host, quietly, without betraying his disgust.

"Oh, really!" said Mrs. Dobbs, languidly.

And, meanwhile, where was Dobbs? The butler had announced his name, and he had followed meekly in the swash of the royal party, stumbling awkwardly over a panther's head by the door. But nobody noticed his mortification, and nobody noticed him, thin, sallow, little man that he was. He slunk into a corner to pull his gray whiskers and twitch his eyes, like a frightened mouse caught in a trap. But he was only Ferry Dobbs, President of the Trans-Mississippi Railway System and the Beet Sugar Trust. So why should people bother about him?

A reverential hush fell upon the gathering in the back drawing-room as the resplendent queen appeared in the doorway. While taking the proffered seat of honor she glanced at the ever-faithful Bertie in a way indicative of a desire. The scent-bottle and fan were carefully deposited in her lap, and then the *cavalière servente* hastened in search of the lost object. He found him in a far-off corner hiding behind a newspa-

per, vainly hoping he had been forgotten. Alas, for the schemes of Ferry Dobbs to escape detection. The vigilant Bertie brushed aside the folds of the *Evening Post* and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Wake up, Dobbs; you're wanted!" was the ruthless command that aroused the little financier from his revery and caused him to amble meekly by the side of Bertie Beacher toward the back drawing-room.

Already the strains of Von Bulowitz's Stradivarius were resonant, and poor Ferry Dobbs trembled at his fate.

Not so the wily Dickie Willing. Having started the *maestro* on his fell career, he stole quietly through the curtains and almost fell into the arms of Renée Dressler.

"Come, Dickie," she said, taking the impresario gently but firmly by the coat sleeve and turning him about, "face the music."

"Don't have to," chuckled Dickie; "I furnished it."

"Pity you can't furnish yourself."

"With what?"

"Brains, dear boy," she murmured, sweetly, as she disappeared between the curtains.

"Don't need 'em in society," he called after her. Then, with evident self-appreciation, he giggled, "Ha! Rather neat, what?" But, as no one was there to applaud his witticism, he sauntered lazily toward the smoking-room door and collided with Norman Wendell.

"Hello, Normy," he said. "Music's on—better hurry."

"No; I'm in no mood for music to-night," Wendell answered, dejectedly, and Dickie Willing stared, unable to comprehend that a man could have feelings to betray.

He was on the point of chaffing Wendell, when the music suddenly ceased.

"Hello! what's up?" Dickie exclaimed, visions of a fiasco disturbing the equanimity of his soul. Wendell

was too absorbed with his own misery to vouchsafe a reply; but before Dickie could reach the scene of action Bertie Beacher appeared between the curtains, an expression of horror on his usually vacuous countenance.

"I say, fellows," he cried, "that long-haired idiot stopped playing because Mrs. Ferry Dobbs was talking."

"He deserves a medal if he can make her talk," Wendell muttered, laconically.

"Ha! Rather neat, what?" giggled Dickie Willing, much to the horror of the faithful Beacher, while a newcomer, in the person of Monty Dressler, bored beyond endurance, joined the trio.

"Damn! I can't stand that noise," he grumbled, and then, in a tone that gave expression to his desires, he whimpered, plaintively: "I say, fellows, my tongue's hanging out."

"I know where the old boy keeps his rum," whispered Dickie. "Let's make a sneak."

"Well, rather," exclaimed the thirsty Monty. "You've saved my life.'

"Come on, Norman," cried Dickie, seizing Wendell's arm and dragging him toward the smoking-room.

"No thanks," muttered Wendell, disengaging his arm.

"Oh, he's on the water-wagon," sneered Monty. "Come on, Bertie."

"What!" exclaimed Beacher, with the air of a tragedy queen; "desert Mrs. Ferry Dobbs? Never!" Then, in pursuance of his duty, he strode toward the other room, leaving his thirsty friends to wend their way together.

Thus Norman Wendell was left alone again to ruminate on the strange fatality that brought him face to face with the crisis of his life. "Would she come?" he wondered, one vision always before him. "Were eyes ever so blue and tender?" he asked himself, "or a voice so soft? Was ever so beautiful a face crowned by such matchless hair—was ever a mouth so sweet—was ever

woman so divinely graceful?" Then he laughed at his lover's enthusiasm and paced the floor again, wondering—always wondering. "Ah, well," he sighed at last, "a fool falls in love, and a wise man gets over it—if he can."

IV

If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.
—*Romeo and Juliet.*

The waiting seemed to him an age, but the applause that greeted Von Bulowitz's first number had barely died away when Wendell was startled by the rustle of a gown. He turned, instinctively knowing it was Margaret Irvington. To explain that intuition would be to solve the mystery of love.

"How late you are," he said; "I have been waiting for you."

She gave him her hand and smiled, "I was detained—I could not get away from dinner. But why wait for me?"

Had he been less in love he might have realized that she said this with no special interest beyond the kindliness due from an old and sincere friend. But that tall, dark-haired girl, with the tender blue eyes, carelessly buttoning

her glove, was to him the most radiantly beautiful creature in the whole wide world. He could not analyze nor argue; he could only gaze and blunder forth in a stupid way the reason for his being there.

"I waited because I wanted to talk to you; because there is something I must say to you to-night."

She looked at him in amazement. "Why, Norman," she answered, "how mysterious you are, and how serious, too." Then she hesitated, for there was something in his glance that startled her. "Come," she said, cheerfully, "let us hear the music. What you have to say isn't so very pressing, is it?"

"Yes, forgive me if I insist." He quietly placed a chair beside her. "Won't you be seated?" he asked. "I shan't detain you long."

She took the chair reluctantly and waited for him to speak. But words failed him.

"Come," she said, "what is it? Have you committed murder, or been sued

for libel for your latest portrait? I know it must be something very serious." Her tone was almost flippant, and it made her ashamed, for she had not meant to hurt him. "Well," she said, finally, in a way that gave him courage.

"I hardly know how to begin," he sighed. Then he smiled at his own awkwardness.

"Dear me," she laughed, "this is more serious than I thought, Norman. Why, you must be in love! Tell me who is she? Surely you can trust an old friend."

"*Friend*," he said, bitterly, "I detest the word."

Margaret now began to divine the portent of his remarks, and tried to turn him from his purpose.

"You ought not to detest me," she said, laughingly, "We've known each other too long. Why, we used to make mud pies together!"

Wendell looked into her eyes long and earnestly. "Yes," he said, "it

seems as if I had always known you. Do you remember that day in the country, so long ago, when we were playing in the hay, and I told you that I loved you—that I should always love you?"

"Yes, I remember. I—I cried—then I kissed you; but we were only children then." Tears filled her eyes.

"And if I were to tell you," he said, earnestly, "that I have loved you every day, every hour since then?"

Margaret trembled. "Oh, Norman," she pleaded, "two such old friends as we are—why, that could not be."

"Couldn't it?" he answered, eagerly. "Why not?"

She took his hand and held it tightly. "Norman, can't you see?" she said. "Don't make me tell you in so many words."

He drew his hand away. "Don't say any more," he said, with an effort. "I understand."

"And you won't think less of me?"

"I only wish I could."

"Don't say that," she begged. "Don't make it harder for me."

Wendell looked at her curiously. "How beautiful you are," he said. "Does it make you happy to be absolutely beautiful—to be absolutely certain of your power?"

"What a strange question!" she answered, in astonishment.

"Is it? I—I was thinking of your future."

"My future."

"Yes. I was wondering what he will be like, the—the man whom you will marry."

"Shall I tell you," she said, suddenly, looking up into his face.

"Yes," he answered. "I have a reason for wishing to know."

Margaret turned away thoughtfully, "He will be a man," she said, slowly, "every inch of him—careless and impetuous, if you like, but considerate enough to treat me like a good fellow and an equal. He will make me feel that I can help him and be of some

use to him in his daily life. He will never let me know that I own him body and soul, and he will never tell me I am the only woman he has ever loved. There—that is the sort of man I shall marry."

"You have answered my question," he answered, quietly. He was thinking of a man whose portrait she had seemed to draw. Margaret left her seat and walked slowly away. Then she turned swiftly and came toward him.

"Do you think I am heartless?" she asked.

"I think I shall always worship you," he answered, sadly.

She placed a hand upon his arm. "I care for you a great deal, Norman," she said. "Do—do you want me to marry you?"

He looked into her eyes searchingly. "No," he said, with an effort.

She turned away. "I understand," she answered; "believe me, I do."

"Then we will forget, and only re-

member that we are the same old friends."

"Always that," she said, impulsively. "I could not bear to have it otherwise."

There was a moment of silence. Each was thinking; she of the past, he of the future—as if there could be a future, now.

"And the music, Margaret," he said, finally. "We mustn't miss it all."

They walked together toward the other room, where the deep-toned strains of Tristan's dying love-song came softly from the touch of a master hand. He drew back the curtain for her to pass.

"Believe me," she whispered, softly, "it is better so."

"For you—yes."

V

A weak, poor, innocent lamb.

—*Macbeth.*

"So Freddie Carroll waited an hour at the stage door, and she was with you all the time!" laughed Monty Dressler, as he strode through the smoking-room door arm in arm with Dickie Willing. Their thirst was appeased, and the world was rose-colored.

"Ha! Rather neat, what?" chuckled Dickie, at the thought of Freddie Carroll's discomfiture. Then seeing that his friend was headed straight for the shrine of Apollo, in the incarnation of Von Bulowitz, he laughed derisively.

"What, more music?"

"Got to," replied Monty, meekly. "The missis, you know."

"Don't string me," said Dickie with a wink. "Who's the girl?"

"Come along and I'll show you," said

Monty, trying to drag his friend in the way he would have him go.

Dickie, however, had no desire to be caught in any such trap. He planted his feet stubbornly and refused to move.

"No, sir," he protested. "No Von Bulowitz for me. I delivered the goods —that's all I'm paid for."

Whereupon Monty was obliged to wend his way alone—not to the "missis," but to the side of the particular charmer with whom he was for the time being engaged in "frivoling."

Dickie Willing, left alone, began to philosophize. His reasoning was not deep, but it was to the point, considering his dilapidated finances.

"Why isn't old Schuyler my uncle?" he mused, gazing at the Dutch ancestors that adorned the walls. "Ainslee's got his coffers full already, while I—well, the luck some fellows have!" Then he beheld a vision of loveliness that made him rub his eyes. A young girl with the golden curls of innocence

had stolen into the room and was cautiously peering through the curtains at the great Von Bulowitz.

Dickie perked his head in his most winning way and tip-toed toward her.

"Hello, prettiness," he whispered in a little pink ear.

With a smothered exclamation she darted away, but Dickie was not to be escaped by any such manœuvre. He stepped before her and barred her passage.

"Don't be frightened," he said, reassuringly. "I won't bite."

"But I can't talk to you," answered the girl, naïvely. "I don't know you."

"Never mind, I know you," he laughed.

"But papa would scold me," she protested. "I'm not out yet. How dare you speak to me?"

"Because you're just about the prettiest thing I ever saw."

"And you're perfectly horrid," she pouted, stamping her little foot. "So there!"

"I'm horrid, am I," said Dickie in a tone of disapprobation.

"Don't believe I like you after all. Go to bed, little girl—go to bed," he continued, with a deprecating wave of his hand.

"Well, I never! How old do you suppose I am?"

"Look seventeen," he chuckled. "act seven, general average, twelve. Ha! Rather neat, what?"

"I—I hate you," she cried, her face crimson with rage.

"Never did have any luck," he drawled mournfully. "You hate me—I think you're the nicest ever—we're up against it. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to leave you right now," she answered, with an indignant toss of her head, "and I hope I'll never see you again."

"You'll have to see me when you're out, he laughed, barring her way again. "You'll never get on unless you're nice to me. I lead all the cotillions. I'm

Dickie Willing. Everybody knows me."

"I don't," she answered, with a sneer on her pretty lips. I don't believe you know me."

"Rather. I know everybody. You're little Eveline Schuyler. Papa's darling, brought up in a convent so you won't be spoiled. Oh, I'm not such a fool as I look."

"Aren't you really?" she replied with a stare of amazement, which was calculated to make him feel decidedly small.

"No, honest," Dickie said, straightening himself and assuming an attitude of dignity. "I could teach you a lot."

"Could you?" she answered, solemnly, but with a merry twinkle in her big blue eyes. "You don't look as if you knew anything. How would you begin?"

Dickie swelled his chest imposingly. "By making love to you," he murmured, with his most fetching smile.

"Oh, how nice!" she exclaimed with

evident relish. "And how would you end?"

"By making love to someone else."

"How horrid!"

"But it would teach you a lot. I say, do you read French?"

"Of course," she said, indignantly.

Dickie laughed. "Then I'll send you some novels."

"But papa won't let you," she protested. "He says the world is a very wicked place. I must never know anything about it until I come out."

"By Jove," he cried longingly, "what a time you'll have learning."

"Oh, I hope so. Just think! Next winter I'm going to dances and dinner-parties!"

"Then you've no time to lose," he chuckled. "I'll send you the books to-morrow. Let's see," he continued, with mock gravity—"'Madame Bovary,' 'Sapho,' 'Nana' and—'Aphrodite'—no, you'd better not have that to begin with."

But the wickedness of his remark

was lost on Eveline, for the austere form of her father appeared between the curtains.

"There's papa," she whispered, "Don't let him see me," and, quick as a flash, she dropped behind the back of a big chair, while Willing, with chivalrous intent, rapidly placed himself in a way to cover her retreat.

"Sneak!" he whispered, as Nicholas Schuyler, quite unconscious of the situation, approached the fire.

"Sir, did you address me?" said the elder man, testily.

"I, sir? No, sir," blurted Dickie, much taken aback. "I was admiring that picture," he continued, hurriedly, pointing to a solemn burgher over the mantelpiece, with the idea of diverting Schuyler's attention. "Fine old cock, that."

"That gentleman, sir," exclaimed the host, indignantly, "was my ancestor, Peter Van Cortland, one of the 'nine men' of New Amsterdam in 1647."

"By Jove, what a nose!" cried Dickie,

admiringly. "Did he die of drink?" The host looked at the picture to see if Dickie's insulting insinuation was justified by appearances. And meanwhile Eveline stole out of the room. Dickie had just time to throw her a kiss and she to shake her head reprovingly and make a face at her father, when Nicholas Schuyler turned upon the offending Dickie with the rage of offended family pride.

"Young man," he said, "you've been drinking!"

"Rather," chuckled Dickie, taking his arm. "Let's have another, just to show there's no ill feeling."

Whereupon he proceeded to lead the indignant Knickerbocker toward the smoking-room. But Nicholas Schuyler was in no mood to submit to such indignity. He threw Dickie aside, and exclaimed, angrily: "No, sir; I will not. As for you, sir, I can find no excuse—"

What the outcome of this *contretemps* might have been is hard to say, for, before the situation became more unten-

able for the unfortunate Dickie, Monty Dressler appeared in the doorway, and seeing the impresario, called out, joyfully: "I say, Dickie, supper's on!"

"By Jove! where?" cried Dickie. With three long strides he reached the door, and, arm in arm with Monty, was proceeding supperward before the stately host could recover from his astonishment.

"Dear, dear," Mr. Schuyler exclaimed, gasping for breath. "In my day it was three bottles and under the table to play the man, now it's three cocktails and into society to play the fool."

Then the servants drew aside the curtains, disclosing the great Von Bulowitz surrounded by a cluster of feminine worshippers.

"Superb!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones-Smythe, basking in the effulgence of the *maestro's* smile. "Such feeling!"

"It was just too sweet!" gushed her daughter Mabel.

"Ladies," vociferated the little Teuton, proudly, striking an attitude that

nearly lost him his balance, "you have heard the great Von Bulowitz. Ah, the beautiful woman! She always makes me perspire—*non*, I mean inspire—ah, the language of Engleesh!"

"How touching! What pathos!" sighed Mrs. Jones-Smythe, gazing into his eyes with a languor quite unsuitable to her two hundred pounds of avoirdupois.

Mr. Schuyler was so disgusted with this drivelling hero-worship that he brusquely put an end to the proceedings by offering his arm to Mrs. Ferry Dobbs.

"Mrs. Dobbs," he said, courteously, "won't you honor me? We couldn't sup without you."

"Oh, really?" murmured the queen, with an air of condescension, while Bertie Beacher rose to the occasion manfully.

"Fancy a supper without Mrs. Dobbs!" he exclaimed, with an expression of disgust at the possibility of such an untoward catastrophe.

VI

Struggling to be free, art more engaged.
—*Hamlet.*

The alacrity with which the announcement of supper was greeted by the men might be taken as an indication that they were but scantily nourished, were it not that eating is a *sine quâ non* of Anglo-Saxon society. On the Continent the social shibboleth is *devoir;* with us it is devour. To paraphrase the words of Bertie Beacher: Fancy society without supper—especially in New York!

Wendell had been waiting for a word with Ainslee, and the onset of the guests upon the buffet gave him the opportunity. He called his friend aside just as the latter was on the point of taking Margaret in to supper.

"Schuyler, I—I've told her," he said, hesitatingly.

"Already?" Ainslee answered, in surprise. "Well?"

"I was right—I have no chance."

"Well, perhaps I'm not the one, either," said Ainslee, with an effort to be cheerful.

"No; it's you," Wendell replied. "She as much as told me."

Ainslee glanced toward Margaret. "I almost wish it had been you," he said. She was standing near the door, talking with Renée Dressler, unconscious of the part she was playing in the drama of two men's lives.

"By gad, she is beautiful!" he exclaimed. "She's not like the rest!"

"If you treat her like the rest," said Wendell, suddenly, "remember, I'll owe you nothing."

Ainslee looked at his friend meaningly. "Norman, you've had your chance," he said. "I've played fair."

"Yes. It's your turn now. There's my hand on it. You—you don't know what it costs me."

Ainslee grasped Wendell's hand.

"And mine, too," he said, with determination. "There is no other woman —there never will be."

While ostensibly bestowing praise upon Margaret Irvington's gown, Renée Dressler had been watching the two men out of the corner of her eye. Being satisfied that something serious was transpiring, she edged anxiously in their direction, with the hope of catching a stray word or so. Ainslee saw her manœuvre, and walked away from Wendell quietly, staring at her as he passed. Renée laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"I wondered if you had forgotten me," said Margaret, reproachfully, as Ainslee joined her.

"Forget," he returned, "what is most in my mind? Impossible!"

"Well, how does that please you?" Renée said to Wendell, with an amused glance in the direction of Margaret and Ainslee.

"I might ask you the same question," he replied, coldly.

"Why so? The surest way to keep a man is to have him marry some other woman."

"Yes. Love is merely a longing for something you haven't got."

"And marriage is merely a loathing for something you have. All of which reminds me that just at present I am longing for supper. Shall we go?"

"Oh, it's always time to do something," said Margaret, when they were alone. "Time to get up, to go out, to get dressed, to dine. Now, I suppose it's time to go to supper."

"Not now," Ainslee protested. "Make it my time, won't you?"

"If there is a time for everything," she laughed, "I suppose there is one even for you."

"Won't you let me be serious for one half-hour?"

"Were you ever serious?" she asked, doubtfully.

"I am desperately serious to-night."

"And to-morrow?"

"To-morrow depends on you, Mar-

garet," he said, earnestly. "Did it never occur to you that I might care?"

"To-night? For one half-hour?"

"No — always. I have stumbled through life somehow, and now you come—the one woman on earth I ever believed in, or ever could believe in."

"Oh, wait, wait!" she cried. "If I dared trust you!"

"Can't you see that I mean every word?" he exclaimed, impetuously.

"For the moment, yes. But I might remember—always." Her voice trembled as she spoke, and she turned her eyes away.

"Why do you mistrust me?" he asked.

"Because everything that I know about you tells me that I should."

"Have I ever pretended to be anything? I'm no saint, if that is what you mean."

She gazed at the floor thoughtfully. "You are honest," she said, after a moment, "and that is something."

"You could make me of some use in

the world," he pleaded. "You could make a man of me."

"Are you quite sure?" she answered, looking up suddenly and meeting his glance. "Men always want a woman to help them before they are married."

"No, no!" he said, anxiously. "Take me as I am—a man who has knocked about the world, with much to regret and little to be proud of. I make no pretense, except that I shall try to make you happy."

She looked into his face earnestly. "I begin to believe," she said at last. She felt the touch of his arm about her waist.

"No, no!" she cried, drawing away in fright. "Wait! Wait!"

"It is cruel to make me wait."

She turned suddenly. "One moment. Is there no other woman?"

"I can't tell you I've never been in love," he said, with an effort. "It wouldn't be true."

"And now? You know what I mean?"

"Now it is only a regret."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes," he answered, slowly, "that is all over."

"If you are deceiving yourself!" she said, with a shudder. "If I should find out that you are deceiving me!"

He took both her hands and drew her toward him. "I love you," he said, "I love you, Margaret!"

Fear and doubt were stifled by the quick beating of her heart. "Yes, I believe you," she said, impulsively.

"Only one word—it means so much."

"Yes—I love you."

When Nicholas Schuyler came into the room a moment later he blinked in astonishment at the sight that met his eyes.

"Schuyler, you rascal!" he cried, "what does this mean?"

"It means, uncle, that Miss Irvington has promised to marry me. Your bad penny has turned up heads for once."

"You lucky dog!" exclaimed the uncle. "But you don't deserve her." Then, taking Margaret's hand he kissed

her on the forehead. "My dear young lady," he said, "you've done honor to our family."

"I hope you may never think otherwise," she answered, seriously.

Renée Dressler, coming from the supper-room, stopped in the doorway to survey the scene. She bit her lip angrily, and Norman Wendell smiled at her discomfiture.

"Oh, I beg pardon," she said, sarcastically, "do I interrupt a family council?"

"No," answered Ainslee, quickly, "a family rejoicing. Miss Irvington has promised to marry me."

She glared at him a moment, then turning to Margaret, said, with evident maliciousness: "Really, I congratulate Miss Irvington on making the match of the season."

"A woman of the world, my dear Mrs. Dressler," interrupted Mr. Schuyler, quietly, "never betrays her feelings."

Renée Dressler looked at him haughtily. "A woman of the world never has

feelings to betray," she said. Then turning to Ainslee, she whispered, quickly, "Schuyler, you're a fool."

"Possibly," he answered.

Margaret saw the look of evil in her face.

"The other woman," she thought. "I wonder . . ."

PART II

ONE AFTERNOON

I

Respecting this our marriage.

—*Henry VIII.*

A year of matrimony will usually kill the illusions of a woman, or cure her of the desire for further conquests. If fortunately allied, she will realize that the reality of satisfactory matrimony, with love to play the rôle of domestic *deus ex machina* is a far more comfortable status than chasing rainbows. Marriage is more or less a game of give and take. Were women to recognize this fact more universally there would be fewer wives moping about in tea gowns or listening to the purring of tame cats.

It is one thing to purr sympathetically in the lamplight and another to be sweet and cheerful at the breakfast table; therefore the tame cat has a distinct advantage over the liege lord until the wife discovers that he will play and purr

and be ever so cunning and attractive until he has eaten the canary. But, alas! when the bird is caught and consumed the tame cat will retire to his own fireside to sleep off the effects, and when he awakes he will lick his chops and begin to search for another canary, while the lady is left to mourn the loss of her pet, if not her reputation.

A year of matrimony had brought Margaret to a point where her happiness was very much like a kite in a high wind. One moment it would soar into the clouds and the next it would almost dash itself to pieces on the ground,while all that held it was a single thread called "confidence," and that often seemed on the point of breaking.

On a cloudy afternoon in December Margaret was sitting in the library window-seat of her new house reading a novel. It was one of those stories of a woman's moods in which the disease is diagnosed without providing the cure. The author, however, seemed to realize his shortcomings, for in an apologetic

way he stated, in an obscure paragraph that most readers would skip, that "Happiness is merely the habit of good impulses."

Margaret read the line again, then threw the book aside impatiently. "How little people who write books know about life!" she sighed. "Happiness must be the habit of never feeling." Then she gazed out of the window. Mrs. Egerton drove by in a new victoria, and Eveline Schuyler ran into the room, calling, impetuously: "Cousin Margaret! Cousin Margaret! Where are you?"

"Here, child," said Margaret.

"Well, if this dance is for me," pouted Eveline, "I think I might have something to say about it."

"Why, what is the matter?" Margaret asked.

"Lady Coldstream is the matter," the girl answered, peevishly. "What does she know about dances?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, Dickie Willing certainly knows something about them."

"If he knows about anything it must be about dances."

"I think you're—you're dreadful," answered Eveline, kicking a stool to give vent to her feelings. "And I don't see why you invited Lady Coldstream here, anyway."

"Why, last summer at Homburg she rather amused me, when everything was going wrong. I told her that if she ever came to America I hoped she would stop a few days with me. She came, of course; the few days happen to have become a few weeks, but that was to be expected — the English are so very casual in America."

"Why do you let her stay?"

"I can hardly send her away. Besides, she still amuses me."

Ainslee came into the room. He glanced at Margaret a moment, then he picked up an illustrated paper, the leaves of which he turned nervously without seeing the pages. Margaret looked out of the window.

Eveline glanced from one to the other

understandingly, then she turned on her heel and walked away.

"Don't go, Eveline," said Margaret. "Schuyler and I haven't anything to say to each other."

"But there's no knowing what Lady Coldstream might do to Dickie Willing if they're left alone," answered the girl, throwing aside the portière.

Ainslee waited until Eveline was out of hearing; then he put down his paper quietly and came toward his wife.

"It seems to me we have a great deal to say," he said, "if we could only say it. There was a time when we understood each other."

"Yes — before we were married," sighed Margaret. "People always understand each other then — or think they do."

"But what, in heaven's name, is the matter now?" he asked, impatiently. "What have I done?"

Margaret watched some children playing in the park. "I told you once," she said, after a moment.

"Did you?" he answered, dropping into a chair, resignedly. "It must have been a long time ago. At present you seem to revel in unexpressed grievances."

"What can't be cured must be endured," she said, as she carefully rearranged the pillows of the window-seat.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sharply.

Margaret looked at him with an expression of disdain. "You know well enough," she said. "I mean Renée Dressler."

Ainslee jumped to his feet. "Really, Margaret, you are absurd," he answered, plunging his hands into his pockets and pacing the floor. "You know that was all ended long ago."

"I know you told me so."

"Do you mean to say you believe there is anything between us now?"

"I only believe what I see," she said.

"Well, what have you seen?" he asked, stopping suddenly and looking at her with a puzzled expression.

"I saw her follow you to Homburg. I couldn't even have my honeymoon in peace."

"Homburg was very dull last Summer, and even you must admit that she is amusing."

"She must be, judging from the number of her admirers."

"There's safety in numbers, my dear," he laughed.

Margaret raised herself suddenly and looked him full in the eyes. "She's made a dead set for you," she said, "not only at Homburg, but ever since we got back. It takes a woman to see through another woman."

"How about a man seeing through another man?" he sneered. "How about Mr. Norman Wendell? He was at Homburg, too."

"What if he was? He's only a very old friend."

"He was in love with you."

"I never was in love with him," she answered, sharply. "And you were with Renée Dressler."

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "He comes to see you every day. People are talking about it already. How do you suppose I like that?"

With a start Margaret pushed the cushions aside and sprang to her feet. "Do you mean to say you believe there's anything between us?" she asked.

"I only believe what I see," he answered.

"You have no right to turn my words against me," she cried. "Do you want me to hate you?"

Ainslee laughed. Then, going toward her, he put his arm around her soothingly.

"Come, Margaret, dear," he said, "you are taking all this too seriously. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. Renée Dressler is nothing to me."

She threw her arms about his neck and buried her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, Schuyler," she said, half tearfully, "if you could only see the triumphant way that woman looks at me

—just as much as to say: 'You married him, but he is *mine;* do you understand? *mine!*' It began that night at your uncle's, when you told her we were engaged."

"There, dear, don't worry about it any more," he said, stroking her hair. "I wouldn't let her come between us for anything on earth."

"Will you promise you won't see her again?" she asked, eagerly.

"How can I? You know we meet her everywhere."

"Never mind; cut her. She will understand."

"I'll do anything you ask me, except be rude. I can't, with decency, cut Mrs. Dressler, but I'll see just as little of her as I can. There, does that satisfy you?"

"Then you do love me?" she exclaimed.

"Of course I love you," he said. "You know that I do. My one wish is to prove it to you."

Then he kissed her, and her happiness soared above the clouds into the

clear sunshine, and the slender thread seemed strong enough to hold it there forever.

II

The elect of the land.

—*Henry VIII.*

"Oh, I say; kissing your wife"! said Lady Coldstream, stopping in the doorway and surveying the situation. "Fancy! You Americans do such extraordinary things."

Lady Coldstream was a superb creation, with frizzled hair and a wasplike waist, and wearing a tailor gown that fitted as if she had grown into it. She had big, dreamy eyes and a little drooping mouth. Her pictures were displayed in Bond street among the types of reigning English beauties. She was thirty-eight, but she might have passed for twenty in the lamplight.

Ainslee looked up in answer to her remark. "Why not?" he said. "It's not improper, is it?"

"Improper! No, by Jove! Idiotic!"

and Lady Coldstream advanced into the room, followed by Eveline and the ubiquitous Dickie Willing. "Coldstream tried to kiss me once. I asked him if he was so unpopular that no other woman would."

"Ha! Rather neat, what?" gurgled Dickie, with evident appreciation.

"And that silly man, too," rejoined Lady Coldstream, with a glance of scorn in the direction of the unfortunate Willing; "he positively objects to having any sitting-out corners at the party."

"Rather!" expostulated Dickie. "Nobody will dance."

"Yes," exclaimed Eveline. "It would spoil Dickie's cotillion."

"My dear," said Lady Coldstream to Margaret, "you really must have them. Fancy a dance with no place to kiss a girl, or even hold her hand! Why, in London the men wouldn't come."

"But this is New York," Ainslee suggested.

"Aren't the men human over here?"

"Oh, yes, but not at dances," an-

swered Ainslee, walking toward the door of his den. "They have so many better opportunities."

"Oh, Schuyler," expostulated Margaret. "How shocking!" But he did not heed the reproof.

"Send me a pick-me-up, Schuyler," called Lady Coldstream; "there's a dear —feeling rather dicky."

"Certainly," he said, as he closed the door.

Lady Coldstream threw herself into an easy chair and crossed her legs. Then, taking from her pocket a little silver case adorned with a coronet, she proceeded to light a violet-tipped cigarette.

Eveline sidled toward Margaret, keeping an eye on Lady Coldstream. "Cousin Margaret," she said, in a stage whisper, "don't let her spoil everything. Dickie's been working so hard to make the dance go."

"I should say!" exclaimed Dickie, proudly. "Didn't sleep all last night. Inventing something startling. Got it,

too. Going to have a live baby elephant to bring in the favors. I'm going to drive him myself in a Roman chariot —Ha! Rather neat, what?"

"Nasty beast," interrupted Lady Coldstream, puckering up her nose. "He'll be sure to stick his trunk down my neck looking for sugar plums."

"But won't Mrs. Ferry Dobbs be crazy!" chuckled Dickie. "She had only a goat."

"Well, scratch my entry, then," said Lady Coldstream, coughing from an over-inhalation of smoke. "I can run a dance, but not a menagerie."

Just then a servant approached, bearing a tray on which was a decanter and a bottle of soda. Dickie looked at the tray longingly, but there was only one glass. Eveline pulled his coat-sleeve.

"Now's our chance," she whispered.

"Rather—before she changes her mind." Then they tiptoed quietly out of the room.

"That's a quaint Johnny," said Lady

Coldstream, as she poured out what men would dub "a pretty stiff drink." "Does he get paid for managing parties?"

"Yes," answered Margaret, taking up her book again and running over the leaves carelessly. "We all help him out that way. He had a fortune once, but it ran away."

"Just like Lord Meadowmere," grunted Lady Coldstream. "He had the 'oof' and a wife, too; but they both ran away. Poor dear, he had to turn dressmaker. I was dotty about him once, so went to his place just to give him a leg up. Fancy! He took my clothes off and stuck pins into me. Beastly improper, wasn't it?"

"Of course—Oh, what did you say?" said Margaret, vaguely.

Lady Coldstream put down her glass and looked at Margaret. She was gazing at the floor, and did not notice that she was being surveyed by the critical eye of a woman who had lived the pace.

"I say, Margaret, you *are* cut up," vouchsafed Lady Coldstream, after a moment.

"I was only worrying," Margaret sighed.

"My dear, no man is worth worrying about."

"I didn't say it was a man."

"My dear, no woman ever worries about anything else."

"It was only Schuyler."

"My dear," continued Lady Coldstream, laconically, "don't bother about your husband until you are so old other men won't bother about you."

"I am not that kind," Margaret said, sharply.

"Oh, I say," murmured her companion, "how about that painter of yours?"

"He's only an old friend."

"Oh, of course," said Lady Coldstream, pointedly, "they always are."

Margaret's face flushed. "Muriel, believe me," she protested. Then she checked herself. "Oh, you would

never understand—why discuss the matter?"

"As you please," answered Lady Coldstream, reaching for her whisky and soda. "Let's talk about the weather or Charlier-Duval. He's coming this afternoon isn't he?"

"Yes, I've asked Mrs. Ferry Dobbs and a few people to see my portrait."

"'Pon my honor," exclaimed Lady Coldstream, putting down her glass emphatically. "I can't see how you endure that man. He's a French cad, and that's 'the limit,' as you say over here. But you Americans will take up with anything that's foreign."

"Exactly," laughed Margaret. "That's why you have had such a success."

"I say," frowned Lady Coldstream, "that *is* a nasty one."

Margaret did not vouchsafe a reply. There were moments when Lady Coldstream bored her. She was better taken at dessert than as a tonic before dinner. So the English beauty sipped

her pick-me-up in silence, and Margaret turned the leaves of her novel until a servant appeared and announced:

"Monsoor Duval!"

A diminutive Frenchman, with the rosette of the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole, followed the announcement, and bowed impressively with his hand on his heart. His hair floated in several directions, and so did his tie. But he was a portrait painter, *à la mode*, and was necessarily made up for the part, even to trousers that did not fit and a turned down collar of Byronesque cut.

"*Chère Madame, your serviteur*," he said to Margaret. Then, taking her hand and pressing it to his lips: "Will you permeet ze humble homage of art at ze shrine of *beauté?*"

Lady Coldstream giggled—but Charlier-Duval, undismayed, turned toward her and, striking an attitude of admiration, said, effusively:

"Ah, vat a picture! Zat pose—I paint him!"

"What!" exclaimed Lady Cold-

stream, "paint me with a whisky and soda? Happy thought, by Jove!—your pictures do need spirit."

"Oh, do not say me no," said the little Frenchman, kissing her hand and looking into her eyes pleadingly. Then he whispered, confidentially: "For you I make ze price only five thousand dollar—ze honaire ees so great!"

"Well, when you paint me," she growled, drawing her hand away with a little shrug of disgust, "I'll be so old colors will run at sight of me."

"Ah, Lady Coldstream, you aire cruelle," he sighed, perking his head on one side and screwing his face and shoulders into an expression of despair. Then, turning to Margaret, he asked, anxiously; "But vill ze great Meeses Ferry Dobbs come to honaire my *chef d'œuvre?*"

"I asked her," Margaret answered. "As there'll only be a *very* few people, she'll probably come."

"Unless I paint ze great Meeses

Ferry Dobbs," exclaimed the Frenchman. "Carolus and Chartran vill say I make no success in America."

"Then make her an exclusive price," said Margaret, coldly, as she turned to greet Norman Wendell, who, as *l'ami de la maison*, had sauntered in unannounced.

"Oh, Norman," she said, eagerly, "I'm so glad you've come. My portrait's just finished. I want to know what you think of it." Turning to the Frenchman, she continued: "Mr. Charlier-Duval, let me introduce Mr. Wendell, one of our American painters."

The foreigner looked Wendell over from head to foot; then, with a deprecating shrug of the shoulders, he said: "Ah, I deed not know zere were any painters in America."

"Exactly," Wendell murmured, gently. "We American painters have to go to Europe to find appreciation, Monsieur *Charlatan* Duval."

"*Charlier*-Duval, monsieur," cried the

Frenchman, growing very red in the face.

"Pardon me, I had not heard the name before," said Wendell. "I have just returned from Paris."

"Monsieur, you insult me!" shouted Charlier-Duval, inflating his chest.

Margaret, frightened at the *contre-temps*, stepped between them hurriedly.

"Really, gentlemen," she exclaimed, "I—Oh, there's Mrs. Ferry Dobbs."

Charlier-Duval drew himself up proudly. "Then I vait," he said with an impressive gesture of defiance, while Wendell turned on his heel and sauntered away.

Mrs. Dobbs and Beacher swept into the room with terrifying magnificence, while the lowly partner of the royal joys and sorrows stumbled over an obtrusive taboret and dropped his hat.

"So glad you could come," said Margaret, cordially. "I do hope you'll like the portrait."

"Oh, really," murmured the queen

languidly, handing her muff to Beacher, who passed it disdainfully to Dobbs.

"May I introduce Monsieur Duval?" Margaret continued. "He is so anxious to meet you."

"Oh, really," muttered Mrs. Dobbs, condescendingly handing her pocket-book to Beacher, who, after glancing at Dobbs distrustfully, put it quietly into his own pocket.

Meanwhile, the little Frenchman clicked his heels together and bowed obsequiously.

"*Chère madame,*" he said, "your *serviteur.*" Then, pressing the royal hand to his lips, he continued, with effusion: "Will you permeet ze humble homage of art at ze shrine of *beauté?*"

But Mrs. Dobbs remained unmoved. With the desperation of despair, the painter posed himself for his *coup de grace.*

"Ah, vat a picture!" he cried. "Ze pose of a queen! I paint him!"

"Oh, really," she answered, coldly,

casting a look of annoyance at the faithful Beacher.

"Oh, say me not no! For you I make ze price only twenty thousand dollar," whispered the Frenchman, confidentially, "ze honaire ees so great."

But Beacher rose to the occasion. "I say, Mrs. Dobbs," he interrupted, "there's Lady Coldstream."

"Oh, really," eagerly cried the queen, turning away from poor Charlier-Duval, and leaving him to glare dejectedly at her departing grandeur. "Queen!" he muttered. "*Non—canaille!*"

"So awfully good of you to dine with us on Thursday, dear Lady Coldstream," said Bertie Beacher, breaking into the conversation the English beauty was holding with Norman Wendell. "Isn't it, Mrs. Dobbs?"

Lady Coldstream gave them both a withering glance. "Oh, really," she said. Then she turned her back and continued her talk with Wendell.

The queen drew herself up with dignity and gasped.

"Never mind, she's English," whispered Beacher, soothingly, and together they sought a refuge in the corner, while Dobbs, who had witnessed the collapse of the royal assurance, grinned a meek grin of satisfaction.

"I do hope we are not too late," shouted Mrs. Jones-Smythe, as she burst into the room with breathless haste. "We did hurry so to get away from Mrs. Egerton's, didn't we, Mabel?"

"Yes, mamma," simpered the dutiful daughter.

"You're just in time," said Margaret, resignedly. Then, seeing in the arrival of Monty Dressler a chance of escape, she called to the Frenchman, who was still alone: "Let me introduce you to Mrs. Jones-Smythe, Monsieur Duval." And leaving the painter to his fate, she turned to Monty Dressler eagerly, feeling that even he was a relief.

Charlier-Duval glanced at Mrs. Jones-Smythe and shuddered. His bow was lacking in impressiveness.

"It is a great honor to meet so dis-

tinguished an artist," was the effusive greeting of Mrs. Jones-Smythe. "Isn't it, Mabel?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Oh, I beg pardon," said the admiring mother, "this is my daughter, Mabel. She adores art. She paints tea-cups charmingly."

Charlier-Duval lifted his eyebrows in mild amazement, while Mabel seized her mother's arm hurriedly. "Oh, mamma," she whispered, "there is Mrs. Ferry Dobbs."

"Oh," exclaimed the mother, "I must speak to her." And, with a hurried excuse to Duval, she waddled toward the queen, dragging Mabel after her.

Duval shrugged his shoulders suspiciously. "Jones-Smythe," he murmured; "I know not ze name." Then he took a little morocco-bound notebook from his pocket and hurriedly ran over the pages. "Bah!" he said, finally. "She ees not in ze seventy-five. I make her not a price."

Margaret had been endeavoring, in-

effectually, to converse with Monty Dressler; but books and music were beyond his understanding, so her efforts ended abruptly, while his eyes traveled about the room restlessly, as if he were seeking a plausible means of escape.

"I say, aren't you jealous?" he said, with a meaning glance across the room. "Look at Wendell and Lady Coldstream—I wouldn't trust him too far, if I were you. She's quite a fascinator."

"Really, Mr. Dressler," answered Margaret, coldly, "I fail to see the point."

"The point!" laughed Dressler. Meeting a stony stare, he hesitated. "Oh, the point is—ah—um—where's your husband?"

"You'll find him in his den," and Margaret turned away abruptly, leaving him to chuckle to himself: "I had her there," as he sauntered off in search of Ainslee.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Jones-Smythe was pounding away with verbal artillery in a vain attempt to reduce the defenses

of Mrs. Ferry Dobbs; but the latter was equal to the occasion, and after repeated repulses the attacking party was forced to plead, as a final effort:

"Oh, I'm so disappointed. Wouldn't Friday do, or Monday—or any day you like? You know I am counting on you."

"Oh, really!" said Mrs. Ferry Dobbs, frigidly, with a stare that was absolutely squelching, as she turned on her heel and strode away, leaving the discomfited tuft-hunter to recover from her ignominious defeat as best she might.

"The cat!" hissed Mrs. Jones-Smythe, when she had caught her breath.

"Never mind, mamma," said Mabel, reassuringly. "We're as rich as she is —some day it'll be our turn."

Lady Coldstream had been taking in this little comedy of manners. "The queen is rather nifty, what?" she said to Wendell.

"Yes, it is getting more difficult every day for a well-bred woman to keep her position in New York."

"Poor Mrs. Smythe, I pity her," replied Lady Coldstream, feelingly.

"Don't pity the rich—they, too, have their pleasures, said Wendell, quoting a proverb he had heard somewhere.

Charlier-Duval, however, was growing impatient. He stood alone in the center of the stage, but the audience failed somehow to realize the presence of the star.

"And ze portrait," he called to Margaret. "Meeses Ferry Dobbs have not seen him."

"Muriel, dear," said Margaret to Lady Coldstream, "won't you lead the way? I am really ashamed to show myself off."

"You ought to be proud, my dear—it flatters you tremendously."

"Thanks, dear," laughed Margaret. "I shall never be conceited so long as you are here."

Lady Coldstream did not vouchsafe a reply, but obediently led the way to the drawing-room, followed by the Jones-Smythes. Charlier-Duval swelled

his chest imposingly and held the portière for Mrs. Ferry Dobbs to pass, while Beacher, obedient to a glance from the queen, disturbed the equanimity of Ferry Dobbs' slumbers by shaking him and saying, gruffly: "Wake up, Dobbs; you're wanted!" Whereupon the little millionaire shuffled meekly toward the drawing-room, upsetting a vase of flowers as he passed.

632278

III

Such cause of suspicion.
—*Merry Wives of Windsor.*

Margaret turned away from the retreating guests with an expression of relief. Fortunately, the presence of Lady Coldstream would gratify the pretentiousness of Mrs. Ferry Dobbs, so she felt at liberty to steal a word with Wendell.

"How tiresome those people are," she said, sinking wearily into the corner of a divan.

"Yet they are your friends," answered Wendell, drawing up a chair.

"Hardly," she said, with a tinge of sarcasm. "One has only acquaintances and enemies in society."

"Why so cynical, Margaret?" Wendell asked, looking into her face anxiously. "It isn't like you."

"Do you know what I am like? I hardly know myself."

"I know what you have been to me," he said.

"You foolish boy," she laughed. Then, after a moment's thought, she continued: "I wish you would fall in love with some nice girl. I want you to be happy. I am almost happy myself to-day."

"Why, only yesterday you told me —" he exclaimed.

"Forget it, Norman," she interrupted. "I was wrong to speak of it. It was nothing—only my foolish jealousy."

"Are you quite sure?" he asked.

"Why do you ask me that?" she said.

Wendell hesitated. "Because I might help you," he said, finally. "He would listen to me. I could *make* him listen."

"You needn't," answered Margaret. "We talked it over to-day. We understand each other now."

Wendell looked out of the window at the passing carriages. "Forgive me," he answered, quietly, "for thinking Schuyler would do anything to make you unhappy."

"You are always a comfort, Norman," said Margaret. "It is something to know there is one person one can count on."

For a moment Wendell did not answer. Then he turned suddenly and, looking into her eyes, said earnestly:

"Let me help you if there is ever need—let me still see you often."

Margaret smiled. She was thinking of what Lady Coldstream had said about husbands and other men. "And the more often I see you, the more people will talk," she said, placing a cushion behind her back.

"Need we throw away our friendship for that?" he asked. "People will always talk about something."

"I suppose so," she sighed.

"Let me feel I am something to you," he said, anxiously; "that I have still some part in your life."

She looked up and met his eyes. "And should I need your help," she asked, playfully, "will you promise me your strong right arm?"

He pressed her hand to his lips. "Yes, I promise," he said.

It was not the moment either would have chosen for the entrance of Renée Dressler, but the unexpected happened; just as Wendell took Margaret's hand she appeared in the doorway and, taking in the situation at a glance, smiled with undisguised satisfaction at what she saw.

"Oh, I beg pardon," she said, sarcastically, "I feel I interrupt."

Margaret blushed. Innocent as Wendell's action had been, she saw quickly what Renée Dressler meant.

"Not at all, I assure you," she said, confusedly.

"Really—I heard Mr. Wendell had gone to Westbury—so finding him here, I thought—" Then Renée Dressler looked at the ceiling and smiled.

"I am going later," said Wendell, sharply. "There is surely nothing surprising in finding me here."

"With so attractive a woman—cer-

tainly not. But it looked as if I might be *de trop*."

"That is usually the case with a third party, Mrs. Dressler, where you are concerned," said Margaret, coldly. Then she turned away abruptly and followed by Wendell, entered the drawing-room.

Renée Dressler shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "So it is to be war," she said to herself. "Very well; I accept the challenge."

Going to the table, she took up a photograph of Margaret, and eyed it critically. Smiling significantly, she put it back in its place and, taking up her muff, started toward the door of Ainslee's den, where she met her husband. Monty was evidently in bad humor, for he swore under his breath and slammed the door violently.

"Please, remember, you're not at home, Monty," said his wife, reprovingly. "Your domestic manners hardly adorn society."

"Society be damned!" muttered Mon-

ty, "and Ainslee, too. He's gone back on me."

"You can't blame him, can you?" sneered Renée. "A husband who fleeces his wife's admirers is not an edifying spectacle, even in New York."

"You're a nice lot to talk," he growled. "You and your beastly extravagance have got me into this mess. Now you've got to get me out. You must make Ainslee renew the loan."

"And if I can't or won't?"

"Then we leave Fifth avenue for the poor-house."

"How charming!" Renée exclaimed, with an air of relief. "Then I shall be able to divorce you for non-support."

"None of your confounded sarcasm," snarled Monty. "Can't you see the hole I'm in?"

"My dear Monty," she answered, sweetly, "you seem to forget that Schuyler Ainslee is married."

"I forget nothing," he answered, with a meaning look. "I simply give you credit for being a clever woman."

"You flatter me," she exclaimed, "but I fear your confidence is misplaced. Only yesterday he asked me to return his letters."

She drew a bundle of letters from her muff and waved them tauntingly before his eyes.

"Are you fool enough to do it?" he asked.

"Why not? They are ancient history now," she said.

Dressler snatched the letters out of her hand. "Then I'll keep them," he said, drawing away from her quickly. "They might come in useful."

"Monty," she cried, angrily, "give those letters back. I'll help you in my own way, or not at all."

Dressler paid no attention to what she said, but taking one of the letters from the bundle he began to read it.

"Oh, ho!" he laughed. "This hardly sounds like ancient history. Listen! 'DEAREST R.:

'N. W. is going to the country. Meet me at the studio at 11.30. The door will

be open, so don't ring. And above all, don't disappoint me.

'Yours, as ever,
'S.'"

Monty looked at her quizzically. "When was this written?" he asked.

"Last year, I suppose," she answered, indifferently. "I have not heard from him for months."

Dressler examined the letter carefully. "There is no date," he said. "It might have been written to-day. How fortunate I am such a trusting husband!"

Renée approached him quickly and snatched the letters from his hand. "What a cad you are!" she said.

"You're not the one to call names," he answered. "I'm not the only man in New York who has gone to the devil to keep his wife in the swim. I might have been a decent chap if I hadn't married you."

"Yes, and I might have married Schuyler Ainslee and had all this," she said, with an envious glance about the room. Then she pushed him from her

angrily. "Go, Monty, go," she cried. "Oh, sometimes I feel I could kill you."

He walked to the door sullenly, then he turned and looked at her. "Good God, Renée," he said, "you could give the devil points."

She did not answer, so he left her gazing at Ainslee's letter. "It might have been written yesterday," she said, when she heard his step in the hall. "What if it were?" She folded the letter carefully and put it in her muff, keeping the others in her hand.

"I'll keep that letter," she thought. "Some day, Schuyler Ainslee, I'll clip your wings."

IV

But my revenge will come.

—*Hamlet.*

When Ainslee came into the library a moment later he found Renée Dressler seated before the fire, with her head thrown back and her feet on the fender, in an attitude indicative of possession. She had made up her mind to hold her ground, and such a trifling matter as Margaret's defiance had not in the least disturbed her equanimity. On the contrary, her fighting nature had been aroused, and she was resolved to win, by fair means or foul.

Ainslee deliberated a moment as to how he should greet her after the promise he had made his wife; but wishing to avoid an open rupture, at least until he had gained possession of his letters, he went toward her and said, in a friendly way:

"What, Renée, all alone?"

She glanced up and smiled. "Yes; I was waiting to give you these," she answered, handing him the packet she held in her hand.

"Thank you," he said taking the letters without glancing at them. "Most women would have kept them."

For a moment Renée was silent. Then, with a sudden impulse, she left her seat and, turning toward him, said quickly:

"Why did you ask for them? Do you mistrust me so?"

"No, he replied, throwing the letters into the fire with a sigh of relief, "but a dead past is never buried."

"Did it never occur to you that I might hate you?" she said, in a tone of bitterness.

"You never cared enough for that."

For a moment they watched the burning letters.

"So you think love is only a momentary blaze, like that?" she said, finally.

"It is dangerous to play with fire," he answered. "Only friendship is lasting."

"Friendship is too cheap to be worth having," she sneered.

"And love is too expensive to be worth while."

"Your wife and Norman Wendell don't seem to think so."

"What do you mean?" he cried, looking up suddenly and meeting her eyes.

"Oh, nothing," she replied, turning away from the fire and placing her muff carelessly on the table. "But if I were a married man, I should never have a *best* friend."

"You have no right to say that," he said angrily."

"Why, what have I said?"

"No more than the world says, I suppose. Life is made up of some people's misery and what other people say about it."

She looked at him meaningly.

"The way to avoid misery is not to run away from happiness."

"Happiness!" he laughed, "at the price of self-respect? No!"

"Marriage has made a prig of you," she exclaimed. "Why don't you teach your wife this new-found morality—she needs it."

Ainslee clenched his hands together.

"If a man said that," he muttered, "I'd knock him down."

"And when a woman says it?"

"I can only laugh," he answered, turning away and gazing into the fire.

She came toward him and stood beside him for a moment, so that her arm touched his. "There are none so blind as those who won't see," she said, softly. "And—and revenge would be so easy." He felt the pressure of her hand. "Are you never tempted?" she whispered, passionately.

"You tempted me once," he said meeting her glance.

"And now? Have you forgotten?"

"I see no reason for remembering," he said, coldly, turning his eyes away. Then seeing Mrs. Ferry Dobbs and her

suite approaching, he left her and walked toward them.

"Take care!" Renée muttered under her breath. "I have not forgotten, and I may find a way to make you remember."

She sat down by the fire again and stealthily watched the proceedings, while pretending to be absorbed in a book.

The departure of Mrs. Dobbs was the signal for the breaking up of the party. Charlier-Duval followed in her train, and so did Mrs. Jones-Smythe, while Dickie Willing, for the purpose of teasing Eveline, permitted himself to be captured by the simpering Mabel and led away, much to the annoyance of Miss Innocence, who, unaccustomed to such wiles, retired upstairs to weep over the infidelity of mankind in general and Dickie in particular. Norman Wendell, meanwhile, tarried over the cups with Margaret, not unobserved, however, by Renée Dressler, who quietly moved her seat so she could

watch them through the door of the drawing-room.

When Ainslee returned from seeing Mrs. Ferry Dobbs to the door he passed by Mrs. Dressler without apparently noticing her.

"Really, Schuyler," she protested, leaving her seat. "Am I to be ignored as well as forgotten?"

Ainslee turned at the sound of her voice.

"I beg pardon," he said, "I thought you were having tea."

"Oh, dear, no; I was waiting—like a woman for the last word." Then she paused and looked at him curiously. "Which must be——?"

"Which must be good-bye," he answered, coldly.

"Or good riddance," she said, with an indifferent laugh.

"Don't be sarcastic," he protested. "After all, it is the only way."

"For you! But what of me?"

"I can't change the past, even though I should regret it."

"That would be an edifying spectacle," she sneered. "The converted Mr. Ainslee regretting his past!"

Margaret left her seat by the tea table and came slowly toward them, followed by Norman Wendell. They were apparently in earnest conversation, and Ainslee's back being turned, he did not see his wife. With a quick glance Renée Dressler took in the situation and formed a plan for revenge.

"Well," she said, turning to Ainslee, and extending her hand, "the last word."

"Come Renée," said Ainslee, "we'd better part friends."

"No," she answered, watching Margaret carefully. "Having ceased to be lovers, we'd better part enemies."

"Enemies!" he exclaimed.

Renée saw Margaret start back in surprise. It was her opportunity.

"Yes," she whispered. "Remember —women do not forget as easily as men, and—they get even in the end." Then she threw her arms about Ainslee's neck

and cried, passionately: "You love me —you love me! I knew it. Tell me again that you love me!"

With a cry of pain, Margaret seized Wendell's arm. "Oh, did you see?" she exclaimed, her face white with rage.

Ainslee saw his wife, and the meaning of Renée Dressler's action dawned upon him. "Renée, for God's sake don't you see?" he cried, disengaging himself from her sudden embrace.

Renée looked at him with a dazed expression. Then, turning toward Margaret, she quickly assumed a manner of intense embarrassment, and was for the moment confused and speechless.

"Oh," she gasped finally, "this is most embarrassing — quite compromising, in fact." She looked helplessly from one to the other, and, turning to Ainslee, said, with a sickly smile: "Really, Schuyler, we ought to be more careful."

The scene was cleverly acted, and

produced its effect. Margaret, white with anger, started toward her, but Wendell grasped her arm hurriedly.

"Don't!" he cried. "She is trying to humiliate you."

Mrs. Dressler, smiling sweetly, walked toward Margaret.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said. "I've had such a charming afternoon. Your husband has been so entertaining. But he ought to take lessons from Mr. Wendell—he's really quite a novice."

She put out her hand. Margaret turned her back abruptly.

Renée Dressler shrugged her shoulders, and laughed; then, with a familiar nod to Schuyler, she walked out of the room, leaving her muff intentionally on the table.

Margaret sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"In my house—before my eyes!" she moaned. "Oh, this is unendurable."

Ainslee stood there like one stunned. He could not realize that any woman could do such a dastardly thing for

the sake of a miserable revenge. He tried to think, but his brain refused to work. He could only wonder at such cruelty.

Wendell was the first to speak. Angry at the insult to Margaret, he stepped toward Ainslee.

"And this is how you keep your promise?" he cried.

Ainslee started furiously. "Yes," he muttered, "a damned sight better than you keep yours."

On the impulse of the moment Wendell raised his hand to strike.

"No, no," screamed Margaret, throwing herself between them. "For my sake, don't!"

"Well," said Wendell, coldly, "for your sake."

For a moment the two men glared at each other. Then Wendell turned on his heel and left the room.

V

Do not plunge thyself too far in anger, lest thou hasten thy trial.

—*All's Well that Ends Well.*

When the sound of Wendell's footsteps had died away Ainslee turned toward his wife. She had gone to the window and was looking out at the bleak expanse of the park. Instead of tears, there was a bitter, injured look in her eyes, and her lips were pressed together firmly. Renée Dressler's blow had been so sudden and cruel that in her anger she did not realize the awfulness of her position. But she knew that confidence was dead; that the end had come—the end of everything.

Ainslee watched her for a moment, not daring to break the silence. The trap had been so carefully set, and he had been led into it so cleverly, that he

was utterly at a loss for an explanation. But the consciousness that he had done no wrong prompted him to appeal to her sense of justice, with the hope that she would believe the truth.

"Margaret," he said, finally.

She turned and looked him full in the eyes.

"Well?"

Her calmness frightened him.

"How can I explain what you have just seen?" he faltered.

"You needn't explain," she answered. "You may spare yourself the trouble."

"You wouldn't condemn me unheard?" he protested.

"I don't condemn you — you have condemned yourself."

"Don't be unjust," he said, taking a step toward her.

"You have deceived me from the first," she answered, bitterly.

"I have not," he exclaimed. "She was desperate. It was impulse—revenge —God knows what."

"Don't be a coward," she said.

"Don't sacrifice her to save yourself."

"I have a right to protect myself," he protested; "can't you see I am telling the truth?"

"Why lie to me any more?" she replied, turning away wearily. "Does a woman throw herself into a man's arms for nothing?"

"If it were true, if I were her lover," he said, angrily, "I'd be man enough to acknowledge it."

"But I heard—I saw with my own eyes."

For a moment he looked at her reproachfully. "What if I were to doubt your sincerity?" he said, finally. "What if I were to believe what people tell me about you and Wendell?"

With a cry of pain she turned and faced him, her eyes flashing with anger.

"And if it were true, would I be the first woman to seek elsewhere for the love she failed to find at home?"

He seized her hand and drew her toward him. "I know it is only my

word against hers—but can't you see it is not true?—that I love you, not her? Will nothing I can say convince you? Does your heart tell you nothing?"

She thought of the words of an hour before, and the lie he had told her.

"My heart," she laughed; "you had all my heart, all my love—and the chance to prove that I might trust you."

"And you have the chance to make me feel it is worth while to be straight and square—the chance to forgive. Don't throw it away."

With a shudder she drew her hand away. It was not in her heart to forgive.

"You ask too much," she said. "Some day you may know what it is to suffer. I hope you may."

"You can't go like this," he cried. "You *must* listen to me."

"What is the use?" she said disdainfully. "When trust is gone, love is gone. So why pretend?"

Without a word he turned and walked slowly toward the door of his own room;

then he stood for a moment on the threshold watching her.

"Margaret!" he cried, impulsively.

She did not answer.

"Not one word?" Well, as you will —and God help us both."

When he had gone she looked up suddenly and laughed.

"So this is the end, and my poor little heaven was only a fools' paradise—a miserable house of cards, to tumble over at the merest touch. Oh, it seemed so beautiful to-day." The tears came at last, and she covered her face with her hands and sobbed. But it brought no relief. With a sudden effort she dried her eyes and gazed about the room.

"Well, I shall go on living, I suppose. People never die when the fire is burned out."

Her hand fell upon the table and touched something warm and soft. It was Renée Dressler's muff, and for a moment she stroked it abstractedly; then she held it up before her eyes.

"Her muff!" she said. "Soft and furry, like the owner. B-r-r-r—I can almost hear her purr."

With a quick impulse she seized the muff with both her hands and shook it resentfully. An envelope dropped to the floor and lay there with the address exposed.

"Schuyler's writing!" she exclaimed. Picking up the letter, she tore it quickly from the envelope and read:

"'N. W. is going to the country, so meet me at the studio at half-past eleven. The door will be open so don't ring.'"

For a moment she sat gazing at the floor. Then, with a start, she crumpled the letter in her hand.

"To-night," she muttered, jumping to her feet. "After the opera—when he says he goes to the club."

For a while she paced the floor, thinking of the events that had brought forth this new insult.

"Fool!" she said; "does he think I will sit here meekly and let this go on?" Then she paused, and placed her

hands over her eyes. "Let me think! Let me think!" she muttered. "Yes—yes—I'll do it."

In pursuance of the wild plan she had formed she went to the table and rang the bell; then she smoothed out the letter and placed it carefully in the muff as she had found it.

"Will he lie to me again?" she said, rubbing the fur against her face. "Will he beg and implore forgiveness? Oh, to meet them face to face!"

"Did you ring, madam?" asked the servant who had answered the bell.

"Yes," she answered quickly. "Take this muff to Mrs. Dressler. There is a letter inside; be careful not to lose it."

"Very good, madam," replied the man.

Margaret walked to the window. It was snowing.

"And I might have been weak enough to forgive!" she said, finally.

Lady Coldstream came into the room. "I say, Margaret," she asked, "isn't it time to dress?"

"I shall not go to the opera to-night," answered Margaret, decidedly.

Lady Coldstream shrugged her shoulders.

PART III

ANOTHER EVENING

I

I were unmannerly to take you out,
And not to kiss you.

—*Henry VIII.*

Dickie Willing threw open the door of Norman Wendell's studio so unceremoniously that Eveline entered without a question. His evident familiarity with the premises robbed her of all suspicion and she had just time to see that she was standing at the top of a short flight of stairs, and that there were vague forms of easels and men in armor beyond, when the hall door closed suddenly behind her, and she was left in Cimmerian obscurity.

"Why, it's dark!" she exclaimed, drawing back in fright.

"Rather," chuckled Dickie. "Let's play going through a tunnel. Bully game for two." Whereupon he promptly kissed her.

"If you do that again I'll scream!" cried Eveline, struggling to free herself.

"Can't," he laughed; "it's against the rules of the game." And in spite of her struggles he kissed her again. However, if the truth must be known, a girl is never kissed twice against her will, even in the dark.

"Stop, Dickie!" she expostulated, with as much indignation as might be expected from a convent-bred young lady who was experiencing a very wicked sensation without the slightest chance of being found out. "If you don't stop, I'll never look at you again."

"Oh, I don't know," laughed the artful Dickie, turning the switch of the electric light. "Ha! Rather neat, what?" he chuckled, as the lofty study was brought suddenly into view.

For a moment Eveline gazed in bewilderment at the armor, the tapestries and the rare old furniture, gathered from many lands by a lover of the beautiful. Then she realized that a young woman in her position must show some

spirit; so, glaring at Dickie resentfully she walked down the stairs with a haughty tread.

"I'll—I'll never speak to you again," she said, when she felt that a safe distance separated her from her audacious companion.

"Oh, very well, very well. There are others," and Dickie Willing strode into the room with a swagger that gave emphasis to his indifference.

"I suppose you mean Mabel Smythe," said Eveline, with feminine disregard of her threat.

"Didn't say so, did I?"

"I suppose you've kissed her, too?"

"And the girl guessed right the very first time." Whereupon the inconsiderate Dickie proceeded to whistle the refrain of a popular song in which the boy is supposed to do the guessing.

Eveline did not reply. Tossing her head disdainfully, she proceeded to examine a Florentine marriage coffer with the air of a connaisseur, although, as a matter of fact, she thought it must be a

coffin or a mummy-case. She began, however, to realize her position. Something must have happened to Lady Coldstream, and there she was, alone in a bachelor's apartments with Dickie Willing.

"Oh, I wish they'd come!" she said, glancing toward the door anxiously. "I knew something would happen."

"Well, it happened all right, all right," answered Dickie, gleefully, tripping toward her in a manner that foreboded evil intent.

"That will do, Mr. Willing," said Eveline, gently but firmly displacing the arm with which he had surrounded her waist. "You know I am here without a chaperon."

"Rather!" chuckled Dickie. "That's why I embraced the opportunity."

"Mr. Willing," exclaimed Eveline, haughtily, "I am not an opportunity!" Whereupon she withdrew to the farther end of the room and turned her back.

Dickie looked after her disconsolately. "Oh, I *am* enjoying myself," he

muttered, as he went to the wall and pushed the electric bell, suiting the action with the words: "Did anyone say drinks?"

But Eveline was in no mood for badinage. She was thoroughly frightened at her predicament and ashamed of her part in the escapade. So she paid no attention to Dickie's efforts to be funny; and he, finding that he was very much out of it, came toward her sorrowfully, and said, in a pleading tone:

"I say, won't you forgive me? I'll be good next time."

Eveline looked at him scornfully. "Never, so long as I live!"

"Then I hope you'll die young," answered the incorrigible youth.

"Brute!" she cried.

At that moment Wendell's man entered in answer to Dickie's summons, and further hostilities were averted.

"Did you ring, sir?" said the servant, sleepily. Then, seeing Eveline and Dickie, he continued, in evident perplexity: "I beg pardon, sir, I thought it was

Mr. Wendell. Shall I tell him you are here, sir?"

"No, Parker, no," answered Dickie, with a prohibitive gesture. "I'm it." Then, swelling his chest to its proudest dimensions, he continued, authoritatively: "We will feast, Parker—on Mr. Wendell. We will drink, Parker—on Mr. Wendell. There will be seven of us without Mr. Wendell—he can wait."

"Very good, sir," was the imperturbable response. But Eveline, who was now becoming thoroughly provoked by Dickie's imbecility, interupted the proceedings.

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to stop this nonsense," she said to him, "and let the man tell Mr. Wendell we are here."

"Sorry to disoblige a lady," he replied; "but this is a surprise party, and the other surprises have not yet arrived." And, turning to the servant, he continued his commands regardless of Eveline's protests: "Get the chafing dishes ready, Parker—plenty of cold

beer and enough whisky and soda to quench my thirst."

Parker's stereotyped reply of "Very good, sir," preceded his exit from the room, and as the door closed behind him, Eveline gave Willing a glance of withering scorn and turned her back; whereupon he went to the piano, and with one finger and a great deal of pains picked out the notes of the familiar song: "There's only One Girl in this World for Me." This delicate compliment softened the ire of Eveline to the extent of making her glance stealthily over her shoulder at the crafty Dickie, who, seizing this opportunity to display his indifference, pounded out the notes of "There are Other Coons as Warm as You," much to Eveline's disgust and his own merriment.

II

In fair Bohemia.

—*The Winter's Tale.*

When Mrs. Dressler entered the studio a moment later she leaned over the banister to survey the situation. Dickie was pounding the piano with his indefatigable finger, and Eveline was carefully ensconced in a far-way corner, with her back turned upon him and an expression of offended dignity on her pretty face.

"There's a Gibson picture for you," she laughed. "Find the girl who's just been kissed."

However, Nicholas Schuyler, her companion, did not appreciate the persiflage of the situation. Furious at discovering his daughter alone with a man at midnight, he rushed toward Eveline, his face growing redder with every stride.

"Where's Lady Coldstream?" he shouted.

Eveline blushed and tried to stammer an excuse, but Dickie whisked about on his piano stool and manfully entered the breach.

"Oh, don't worry about Lady Coldstream," he drawled. "She's old enough to take care of herself."

"Sir!" hissed Nicholas Schuyler: "wait till you are spoken to."

"Oh, I *am* enjoying myself!" Dickie exclaimed, as he gave his stool another twist and proceeded to finger the notes of "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night." Owing to the slowness with which his repertory was mastered, Dickie's music, though expressive was invariably a season or two behind the times, but he had a *motif* for every occasion ready at hand.

Meanwhile, Nicholas Schuyler strode to and fro, muttering to himself, and Renée Dressler removed her wrap.

"And have you no explanation, Miss?" exclaimed the Knickerbocker, when he

could control his choler sufficiently to speak.

"You see, papa," Eveline faltered, "when we left the opera the carriage wasn't there—because it was only the third act—so we took two cabs. Well, Lady Coldstream insisted upon going with Mr. Dressler and sending us ahead. She said they would follow. Well, they must have got lost. Really, papa, I couldn't help it."

"Scandalous! Scandalous!" muttered the old gentleman. "Follow, indeed! Lady Coldstream ought to be ashamed of herself!"

The diatribe was well timed, for at this moment the English beauty descended the stairs.

"I beg pardon," she drawled, languidly, at the mention of her name.

Mr. Schuyler's colors were, however, nailed to the mast. "Yes, scandalous," he repeated, defiantly. "The idea of allowing my daughter to go about New York at this hour of the night alone with a young man. I repeat, madam,

you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I'm not," said Lady Coldstream, laconically, as Monty Dressler removed her *sortie de bal*, and she stepped forward in all the radiance of a superbly fitting gown and the famous Coldstream pearls. "Fancy wasting one's time watching a girl! She's sure to catch you asleep sooner or later, and when she does she'll make up for lost time—if she's any sort of a girl."

Seeing that Lady Coldstream was incorrigible, the irate father vented his spleen upon the unfortunate Willing.

"As for you, sir," he said, turning upon him sharply, "I forbid you ever to enter my house again."

"Oh, I *am* enjoying myself," muttered the disconsolate Dickie, as he gave expression to his feelings with the one-fingered monody, "You Can't Play in My Yard," while the angry Knickerbocker turned his back and began to inflict on Monty Dressler a dissertation upon the duties of the

modern parent. He had brought Eveline up, as he assured Monty, uncontaminated by the world, and, gracious though he was by nature, his temper was uncontrollable toward those who sought to infect his daughter with the poisonous influences of modern society.

"What made you so late," asked Renée Dressler of Lady Coldstream, with the commendable desire of relieving the situation.

"Why, that beast of a cabman got lost—took us way to Central Park."

"Fancy getting lost with Monty!" said Mrs. Dressler sympathetically.

Lady Coldstream smiled.

"I don't believe you appreciate Monty. He got quite forward in the cab."

"I know," mused Mrs. Dressler. "A husband is like an umbrella—when you lose him always suspect a friend."

"By Jove!" exclaimed the English beauty. "When Coldstream got lost I always suspected——"

"Careful," interrupted Monty, who was listening with one ear. "Youthful innocence is with us."

"Oh, I'm not so innocent," protested Eveline.

"Yes, Eveline's getting on," Lady Coldstream said, with a knowing look. "But I say, where's Mr. Wendell?"

"Puzzle: Find the man who's giving the party," queried Mrs. Dressler, with a glance about the studio.

"He isn't giving the party," laughed Lady Coldstream. "I'm giving the party—the joke's on him."

"Oh, I see. When you asked me I thought it rather strange."

"The sinners are here, Mr. Willing. But where is the publican? I, for one, am thirsty," said Lady Coldstream, turning to Dickie.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, with a meaning look at Eveline. "I wasn't looking for Wendell."

"If you dare tell," expostulated Eveline, with evident fright.

"Oh, I *was* enjoying myself," Dickie chuckled to himself.

"Well, find him, silly," interrupted Lady Coldstream, sharply. Whereupon Dickie ambled leisurely toward the door of Norman Wendell's bedroom, and rapping loudly, called, in imitation of the falsetto tones of Bertie Beacher: "Wake up, Dobbs; you're wanted!"

The mandate, however, brought no response, so Dickie rapped again—in vain.

"Open the door," suggested Mrs. Dressler.

"Can't — it's locked," answered Dickie after a vigorous rattling of the door-knob.

"Rather suspicious," said Lady Coldstream. "These artists, you know."

Dickie pounded again in a manner to wake the dead, and at last the reponse: "Hello! Who's there?" came faintly through the door.

"We want you," called Lady Coldstream.

"We want supper," shouted Dickie Willing.

"Wait," was the muffled rejoinder, "I'll be out in a minute."

So the besiegers awaited the capitulation, and meanwhile Nicholas Schuyler vociferated his opinion to the long-suffering Monty.

"I tell you," he exclaimed, "society is going to the dogs. The young girls know everything, and the married women do everything."

"Rather," chuckled Monty. "It's no longer a privilege to be a man."

"In my day, women were women."

"And men were brutes," interrupted Lady Coldstream. "Just as they are now."

The Knickerbocker's glance was intended to convey contempt, but as Lady Coldstream only laughed, he felt it had been futile, so he turned on his heel and went to the window seat, where he ensconced himself in a comfortable corner and went to sleep, with the firm conviction that he was justified in main-

taining that society *was* going to the dogs when such vulgar creatures as Lady Coldstream were its representatives.

The bolts were withdrawn at last, and Norman Wendell, with a sleepy, disheveled appearance, came into the room and rubbed his eyes.

"Well," he said, "you people seem to have taken possession."

"Rather," growled Dickie Willing. "Couldn't find anything else worth taking."

"To whom am I indebted for this surprise party?" Wendell continued, looking about at the friends who had so calmly possessed themselves of his studio.

"To me," replied Lady Coldstream, quite unabashed. "You looked so bored at the opera I thought you needed cheering up a bit."

"Yes; I couldn't stand but two acts, so came home early. I was reading, and must have fallen asleep."

"Do you always lock the door when

you read?" asked Mrs. Dressler, pertinently.

"Yes. When the fellows next door get thirsty they make a raid. I don't mind their helping themselves, but I do object to being routed out."

"You were so long about opening the door," suggested Dressler, with a knowing look, "that we thought perhaps you were not alone."

"That *would* have been a surprise party," laughed Lady Coldstream.

"Nothing so interesting," said Wendell. "I was merely asleep in a beautiful pink dressing-gown—nothing worse. But how about supper?"

"Oh, I've ordered supper, all right, all right," was Dickie's reassuring response. "Think I'll see how it's coming on." Whereupon he made a hasty exit in the direction of the dining-room.

"Well, I suppose you're all here," said Wendell, with an effort to view the situation as cheerfully as possible.

"Margaret's ill, but Schuyler said he'd come," answered Lady Cold-

stream, arranging the cushions on the divan to support her back. "Didn't act as though he wanted to though."

"I hesitated myself about coming," said Renée Dressler, in a voice modulated for Wendell's ear alone; "but Lady Coldstream insisted. Are you surprised?"

"After this afternoon, your hesitation, not your coming, is the surprise," answered Wendell, coldly.

Renée Dressler looked at him intently. "Come, don't be nasty," she said. "We're both playing the same game."

Wendell turned away in disgust, unwilling to honor such an insinuation with a reply.

"Why didn't you keep your word?" she asked, quickly.

"My word?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes. In the old days, when you said you were going to the country you usually went."

There was a photograph of Margaret

on the ledge of an old Spanish cabinet near by. Mrs. Dressler picked up the picture and looked at it. "But the attractions of new York were not so great then," she said, as she replaced the photograph.

"I am not aware that my actions concern you," he answered, shortly.

"Possibly not. But suppose I had counted on your going. It might have been very embarrassing, don't you see?"

Wendell looked at her in amazement. Her audacity was beyond his comprehension. "Have you no conscience whatever?" he asked.

Renée Dressler laughed. "Fancy having a conscience in New York! Conscience is only the fear of being found out, and so many people are found out nowadays that Mrs. Ferry Dobbs no longer considers it a novelty worthy of a dinner."

"Mrs. Dressler," said Wendell, calmly, "you are my guest. I can say nothing now."

"But to-morrow," she thought, as he walked away, "he will tell the lady everything; and then, with the letter as corroborative evidence—well, we shall see."

Dickie Willing appeared in the door of the dining-room armed with a huge glass of whisky-and-soda and a sandwich. "Oh, I am enjoying myself," he murmured, as he drained his glass; but he was alone in his contentment.

"I say," yawned Monty Dressler. "Isn't this party rather slow?"

The statement was not polite, but it expressed the boredness of the party. Wendell, in the rôle of compulsory host, felt compelled to relieve the situation of some of its monotony. So he went to Eveline and asked her to play something.

"Yes," exclaimed Lady Coldstream. "One of those nigger things."

Eveline took the seat at the piano and rattled off "A Georgia Camp Meeting," while Dickie Willing, inspired by the rag-time music, seized Renée Dress-

ler's hand, and together they performed a sprightly cake walk to the accompaniment of clapping hands.

Ainslee entered quietly just as the merriment was at its height.

"Well, you all seem pretty festive," he said, as he removed his coat.

"You're just in time," called Monty Dressler. "The performance is only half-over."

'And after the performance," shouted Dickie, "remember the concert in the adjoining tent. Tickets only ten cents. Gentlemanly ushers will now pass among you!"

Someone started a popular chorus, and as Parker threw back the portière of the dining-room Wendell mounted a chair and called forth the welcome announcement of: "Supper is now ready in the dining-car."

"Tag—you're it," said Dickie, giving Renée Dressler a parting shove in the direction of a huge chair, into which she fell, panting for breath after the exertion in the cake walk, while Monty

Dressler seized Eveline's hand and dragged her away, shouting: "Come on, Miss Innocence."

Wendell meanwhile descended from his point of vantage, and, extending his arm to Lady Coldstream, invited her to "Come and help feed the animals."

"Rather," exclaimed the beauty. "I'm a bit peckish—but I say," she continued, looking about the room, "where's Mr. Schuyler?"

"Behold the sleeping beauty," laughed Mrs. Dressler, pointing to the window seat, where the courtly scion of old New York was dozing sweetly, with mouth wide open and accompanying noises dangerously approximating snores.

"I say, Uncle Nicholas, wake up!" said Ainslee, shaking him.

"Why—why, what's the matter?" grunted the slumberer, as he opened his eyes in a dazed sort of way and gazed about him.

"Supper—champagne!" called Lady Coldstream.

"No — beer," protested Wendell "We're in Bohemia now."

"Aye," muttered the sexagenarian, as Ainslee assisted him to his feet. "Bohemia, the land of the free and the home of the beautiful. Oh, you artists!" he continued, giving Wendell a friendly slap on the back. "Always jolly dogs. Perhaps you think I am too old to be young. Come, lead the way, I'm game for anything."

Like a schoolboy in his teens he capered merrily to the dining-room, followed by Lady Coldstream and the host, while a salvo of popping corks announced that Dickie Willing had discovered that champagne was not unknown in the wilds of electric-lighted Bohemia.

III

She is too subtle for thee.

—*As You Like It.*

Renée Dressler had purposely stepped aside to let Lady Coldstream pass. By this manœuvre she succeeded in barring Ainslee's way to the dining-room.

"Well," she said, the moment they were alone. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

Her attitude was penitent, and for a moment he stared at her in surprise, unable to reconcile this humble pose with her conduct of the afternoon.

"Nothing you would care to hear," he said, turning away abruptly.

She went toward him and held out her hands appealingly. "Then you refuse to forgive?" she pleaded.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "how can I? It was so heartless—so indecent!"

Renée bowed her head submissively. "Because I ask it," she said, "from the bottom of my heart. Can I do more?"

"You can go to my wife and tell her the truth."

She started angrily, then checked herself. In a moment she was all humility again. "And if I do as you ask?" she said. "If I go to her and humiliate myself for—for your sake? What then?"

"I may forgive," he answered, coldly. "But it would be hard—even then."

"How can you be so cruel?" she cried. "So unjust—here, in this room! If you had any heart you would remember."

"I remember only too well. The first taste of love is sweet enough—the bitterness lies in the dregs."

He was thinking of the time when he shared the studio with Wendell, and the painting of her portrait made her coming possible in the eyes of the world, in spite of the many days when the canvas was untouched. Uncon-

sciously he glanced toward the window-seat, and she knew he was thinking of the moments they had passed together.

"Ah, you do remember! I knew you could not forget."

Norman Wendell came into the studio to find them. He saw her place a hand upon Ainslee's shoulder, and he drew back quickly. He had no wish to play the eavesdropper, but he could not help hearing her say, in a way that made him shudder at the thought of Margaret: "Why are the others here? Why are we not alone? We might have been."

Ainslee looked into her eyes, and his pulses throbbed with the mad longing to hold her in his arms.

"See," she whispered close to his face. "There is where we used to sit. Think, dear, of the old times."

For one brief moment he hesitated. Then, with a sudden realization of her treachery, he drew back in fear and anger.

"Do you honestly think you can trick me again?" he exclaimed.

"Why won't you believe me?" she said, with an injured look.

"Because you taught me unbelief," he answered, taking a step toward the dining-room.

She looked at him curiously, then turned away with a sigh. "And you think I do not care," she said, bitterly. "How little a man ever knows of a woman's heart!"

"A woman's heart," he muttered, "a Chinese puzzle, not worth the solving."

"I ought to hate you!" she exclaimed. "I have tried hard to hate you, but—but I can't. God knows it has been bitter—it is always the woman who suffers."

"Then be generous to her," he said.

"Do you think she cares?" Renée queried, significantly. "She has her Norman Wendell."

"Stop!" he commanded. "Not another word."

"You shall listen," she said, angrily. "Why, to-day I saw him holding her

hand and kissing it. I heard him tell her that he loved her."

"I need better evidence than your word," he responded.

"What! When the whole world knows it? Come! be a man—take your revenge."

"And reap the whirlwind? No, thank you." He turned away, but she seized his hand in both her own and drew him toward her.

"Must I tell you in so many words?" she cried. "Can't you see? Don't you understand? I love you!"

Ainslee stared at her in amazement. He could not believe she was serious. Was it a new trick—a clever play to entrap him again? She looked up tenderly and met his eyes.

"You say it must be all or nothing," she whispered, passionately. "Well?"

"Then let it be nothing," he said, gruffly, releasing his hand and drawing away from her quickly.

"Coward!" she cried.

He could only pity a woman who

would so demean herself. "Don't you see it is too late?" he said.

In a moment of wild passion she had abandoned herself to him—for she loved him, in a morbid, frenzied way, because he belonged to another, because she could no longer trample him under her feet at will.

"It is not too late!" she exclaimed. "I love you! Do you hear? I love you —and you love me!"

Contempt drove the pity from Ainslee's heart. "I do not love you," he declared. "I love my wife. Now do you understand?"

The old tantalizing look came into her eyes. She was herself again—cold, cynical, mysterious.

"So you think I am serious?" she laughed. "You think I'm sentimental, and really care for you! You did not see through my little comedy? Well, I was acting a part. And your wife is acting a part, too. You don't see through that, either. She was jealous of me, wasn't she? And she made you

feel like a brute, didn't she? And you got down on your knees and groveled, and she told you she would never trust you again. And you, poor fool, loved her all the more. Well, watch her, I say—and watch your friend, Mr. Norman Wendell."

Ainslee looked at her curiously. "Renée," he said, "you are the devil."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Women are generally what men make them."

"I say, Mrs. Dressler," said Dickie, as he and Wendell appeared in the door of the dining-room, "is Schuyler so fascinating you can't eat?"

"Fascinating?" laughed Renée. "He was telling me about his domestic bliss. I suppose when he has children his one topic of conversation will be little Schuyler's parlor tricks."

"Well, if that's the case," said Dickie, holding back the portiére for her to pass, "you must be driven to drink."

Ainslee started to follow. "One mo-

ment," said Wendell, stopping before him.

"Well?" asked Ainslee, harshly.

"I was there just now," answered Wendell, pointing to the door. "It was quite by accident, but I couldn't help hearing something."

"Then I'm sorry you didn't hear more," Ainslee replied, taking a step toward the door.

"I heard enough, and I saw enough," Wendell said, angrily, barring his way again. "Do you expect me to let this go on without a protest?"

Ainslee turned toward him quickly, his face pale with anger. "Since when have I become accountable to you?" he growled.

"Since that night at your uncle's, when you gave me your word this affair would stop."

"See here, Wendell," cried Ainslee, "I refuse to be answerable for my conduct to anyone but my wife, least of all to you, when you make it your business to play the spy."

Wendell, remembering his guests, checked his impulse to continue the controversy. "Ainslee," he said, "I have played fair from the start, but you have broken your word. I owe you nothing now. I give you fair warning—it is you against me."

"Then let the best man win," hotly replied Ainslee, as he turned and left the room.



IV

I do suffer love, indeed, for I love thee against my will. —*Much Ado About Nothing.*

For a year Norman Wendell's life had been inspired by the feeling that Margaret's happiness had been realized, and that, come what might, he had acted an honorable part. His love, however, was not a momentary passion or sentimental fancy that time might cure, for men such as he seldom love but once. He had suffered cheerfully because he believed that Margaret had married the man she cared for most. But now, as he stood there alone, after the stormy interview with Ainslee, and realized that her happiness was ended, a wild thought flashed through his mind: Margaret's duty to her husband was ended. His own love would make her forget what she had suffered.

The consequences? He did not stop

to consider them. But, inspired by the impulse of the moment, he went to the Spanish cabinet, and taking up her picture, gazed at it long and earnestly.

"Poor girl," he thought, "and what of you? You chose between us once —and now?"

The hall door was opened softly, and Margaret stole down the stairs into the studio. With a frightened look she glanced nervously about the room. An unfinished canvas standing upon the easel separated her from Wendell, and she did not see him. She was in street dress and wore a thick veil. A fur cape hung loosely about her shoulders. Hearing laughter, she crept cautiously toward the dining-room. Dickie Willing's voice broke forth in comic song, and she drew back quickly. The fur cape dropped from her shoulders and lay upon the floor.

The song aroused Wendell from his revery. Replacing the picture where he had found it, he turned and saw her standing there.

"Margaret!" he exclaimed.

"Norman!" she said, with a start, "you here?"

"Yes. What does this mean?"

She glanced toward the dining-room. "Hush," she whispered, "they must not know."

Wendell went to the door and closed it quietly. "Tell me," he asked, coming toward her again, "why are you here?"

"I—I thought you were at Westbury," she faltered.

"I didn't go. Mrs. Egerton wired me she was ill. But why did you come—if—if you thought I was not here?"

Margaret hesitated. "I—I expected—" she said finally. "Oh, it's nothing. I was mistaken."

The laughter and applause that greeted Dickie's song came faintly through the door. "Why are those people here?" she said.

"It was Lady Coldstream's idea—a sort of surprise party."

"Is Mrs. Dressler there?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"And my husband?"

"Yes."

Margaret paced the floor excitedly. "Did he know you weren't at Westbury?" she asked.

"Lady Coldstream must have told him."

"You did not expect them?" she said, looking at him searchingly. "You knew nothing about their coming?"

"Absolutely nothing," he answered in amazement. "But why do you ask me those questions? What does it mean? Surely you can trust me."

She came toward him quickly. There's no one else I can trust," she replied, with a sigh. "Oh, how can I tell you? This afternoon"—her eyes flashed angrily, and she pressed her lips together—"after you were gone, I found a letter from Schuyler—she left it in her muff. It told her to meet him here to-night."

"Here?" he exclaimed. "Did you think I could lend myself to that?"

"I did not stop to think — I only wanted to meet them face to face. Oh, you don't know what it is to be jealous —this mad beating of the heart—and all the furies of hell dancing before your eyes and screaming in your ears!"

"Yes, yes," said Wendell, impatiently. "But the letter! Have you the letter?"

"No," she answered, removing her veil mechanically and folding it carefully, without thought of what she was doing. "I sent it back in the muff. I did not want her to know I had seen it. But I remember every word of it. 'N. W. is going to the country. Meet me at the studio at 11.30. The door will be open, so do not ring.'" She looked up with misty eyes. "Now do you understand?" she asked.

Wendell did not reply. He was recalling the events of the day and trying to fit together the different bits of evidence. "Oh, I see it all," he finally ex-

claimed, clenching his hands together angrily.

"You believe it is true?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "Shall I tell you why?"

"Why not? It is only a little more to bear."

"Schuyler knew I was going to the country—I told him yesterday—and he has a key to the studio."

"A key?" she exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes. You know before you married we shared these rooms; he had one then—he has never given it back. They used to meet here when I was painting her portrait."

An injured look came into her eyes, "And you did not tell me!" she said, reproachfully. "You let me marry him."

"How could I tell you," he protested, "when I knew you loved him? If I had, you would not have believed me."

"No," she answered thoughtfully, "a woman must see with her own eyes before she will believe."

But Wendell did not hear. He was thinking of Ainslee's perfidy. "That night," he continued, "when he asked you to marry him, he gave me his word it was ended."

"Go on," she said.

"To-night she had the impertinence to insinuate that I upset their plans, and I overheard her say to him: "Why are we not here alone, as we might have been?"

"Yes, yes, I see." She put her hands to her eyes wearily. "The letter—the key—her words."

"Forgive me for telling you," he said, feelingly. "I have only made it the harder for you."

"It was your duty to tell me. It has been harder for you, too, but I had to know some time."

There was a moment of silence, when each waited for the other to speak. Finally Margaret put out her hand. "Goodbye, she said, with an effort. Wendell took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"And you, Margaret," he asked, "what will you do?"

She released her hand and stood gazing at the floor. "Oh, I shall go on living somehow," she answered, with a sigh.

"He will insult you every day that you live!" cried Wendell. "Think, Margaret, think what that means!"

She looked at him reproachfully. "Would you have me acknowledge that I have been beaten—humiliated by her? No, no. That I will never do—never. When I came here to-night my one thought was to expose them to the world. But what would that mean? A scandal—a divorce—my name dragged through the courts."

She turned away to go. She wished to be free to think. The air stifled her.

"You won't go back to him?" he cried, "You want to do that?"

"Why not?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders indifferently, as though her future mattered little now.

With a sudden impulse Wendell

caught both her hands and held them tightly. "Because I love you," he said, looking into her eyes passionately. "Do you hear? I love you! Don't sacrifice my love again. You owe him nothing —absolutely nothing."

"I am still his wife," she said. "Is that nothing?"

"No!" he exclaimed. "You are free! He has broken every promise; he has flaunted his infidelity in your face!"

With a startled cry she drew away.

"Do you mean—? No, you can't mean that!"

"I love you!" he repeated. "I love you with all my soul—with all my life! There has never been a moment when I have not loved you!"

"Stop! stop!" she said, covering her face with her hands. "Are you mad?"

"Yes—mad!" he exclaimed, forcibly seizing her in his arms. "I have waited all my life, and now you are mine!"

She heard laughter and the clinking of glasses. "Let me go," she cried,

struggling to release herself. "Let me go—they will hear!"

"Let them hear! Let the whole world hear!"

He took her by each shoulder and held her away so that he could look into her eyes.

"No, no," he said, "I can't lose you again."

Margaret gazed at him in absolute amazement. She could not believe this man was the quiet long-suffering friend she had always trusted. "You don't know what you are asking," she pleaded. "Let me go! Wait! Wait until to-morrow!"

"Until to-morrow," he reiterated, with a vague, hopeless look, his hands dropping despondently to his side.

"We want Normy Wendell," came all at once from the chorus of voices in the other room

"Oh, if they see me!" she cried, in fright.

Renée Dressler opened the door.

"Leave it to me," she said, standing

in the doorway and talking to the people in the dining-room. "I will find him."

"That woman!" gasped Margaret. "Quick," she cried, seizing Wendell's arm and looking about with terror. "Where can I go?"

For a moment Wendell stood dazed; then, suddenly realizing the danger, he dragged her to his bedroom, just as Renée Dressler turned and stepped into the studio.

"Normy must have a girl there, after all," called Dickie Willing through the open door.

"Then I'll find the girl," laughed Renée, as Wendell closed the portiére with a jerk and placed himself before it.

V

We have caught her madam.
—Much Ado About Nothing.

Renée Dressler walked slowly about the studio, humming a tune. Casting an occasional critical glance at the sketches that adorned the wall, she managed in the course of time to edge her way towards the door where Wendell was standing guard.

"Very clumsy, Mr. Wendell," she said, smiling. "If you did not wish me to be suspicious, you should have drawn the portiére gently and walked away. Who is she?"

"She?" said Wendell, with an effort to conceal his agitation. "There is no 'she,' that I am aware of."

Renée Dressler laughed outright; then she looked him full in the eyes. "There is a woman in that room," she declared. "What is the use of pretending there is not.

Her attack was so sudden that for a moment he could find no words to reply. "Really," he stammered, at last, "you are mistaken, I assure you."

"Then it won't be indiscreet for me to get my handkerchief, she said, naïvely, taking a step toward the bedroom. "I left it in my cloak."

Now thoroughly alarmed and alive to the situation, Wendell recovered himself quickly. "Pardon me," he answered, with a gesture toward an old settle by the stairs where the wraps of the party had been left. "Your cloak is there. Shall I get it?"

"If you will be so considerate." He moved toward the settle. The moment his back was turned she tip-toed stealthily in the direction of the bedroom. Wendell, suspecting her stratagem, wheeled about suddenly.

"Pardon me again," he said, approaching her quickly, "that is my bedroom."

"Eh?" she laughed. "That doesn't frighten me."

"You might at least wait for an invitation," he replied, pointedly.

"Mr. Wendell there is a woman in that room," she said. "She was there when we came. I advise you to take me into your confidence."

He looked her steadily in the eyes; then he laughed.

"How very clever you are! Well, to be frank, there *is* a woman there—a friend of mine—a—a model. You see I did not expect visitors to-night."

She gave a little cry of fright and turned away quickly, covering her eyes with her hand. "Oh, how shocking!" she laughed. "Do let me see her. If she's like most models she's used to being seen."

"But she's a lady!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Renée, quickly.

"I mean she's not exactly the ordinary model." Wendell was growing desperate. "Come, play fair," he pleaded. "You might be sportsman enough to give me a chance to get her out."

Renée shrugged her shoulders. Then she turned toward a sketch from the nude which stood against the wall.

"Is that the model?" she asked "If so, I should call her a model of impropriety."

Wendell quietly leaned against the doorpost and folded his arms. "Well, if you insist upon being so disagreeable," he said, resignedly, "I suppose I must make the best of it. But here I stay until you go."

"Oh, very well," she said. "If you don't mind, I'm sure I don't." With exasperating persistency she prepared for the siege by suppressing a yawn. Then she hummed another tune and beat time with her fingers on the table. Suddenly her eyes rested on Margaret's cloak lying on the floor.

"Very pretty," she said, stooping and picking it up.

Wendell felt the color mounting to his cheeks.

"Shouldn't mind having it myself." she continued, holding the cloak up and

glancing at it admiringly. "Do models always wear Russian sable capes?" she asked, with an innocent look, as she laid the cape carefully on a chair. "Rather expensive for you painters, I should think."

Before he could reply Lady Coldstream and Ainslee entered the room.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed Lady Coldstream. "'Pon my word, Mr. Wendell, you are casual—rum sort of host to desert your guests completely. When I give you another surprise party——"

"Oh, don't blame Mr. Wendell," interrupted Renée Dressler. "He's been very much occupied with a delightful model."

"A model!" cried Lady Coldstream.

"Yes," said Renée, with a glance of triumph at Wendell. "You remember our suspicions—the locked door—the pink dressing gown? Well——"

"Mrs. Dressler, I beg you," protested Wendell.

"Mr. Wendell was at that moment

engaged," she continued, regardless of the interruption—"very much engaged, I take it—with the model for his new picture."

"What picture?" asked Lady Coldstream, wondering at Wendell's apparent discomfiture.

"The one with which he intends to astonish us all," Renée continued. "Something very French—a wife surprised by her husband. 'The Day of Reckoning,' I think you will call it, Mr. Wendell," she added, with a meaning smile.

"Really, Lady Coldstream," cried Wendell, in despair. "Mrs. Dressler is drawing upon her imagination."

"Hardly," Renée contradicted. "The picture I refer to is a study from real life, so it will prove most instructive to husbands." She looked at Ainslee. "To you in particular, Schuyler," she added insinuatingly.

Ainslee, who had been listening rather indifferently, looked up in astonishment.

"I fail to see the humor of all this," he said.

"Possibly," laughed Renée. "But if you will persuade Mr. Wendell to open a certain door, I think you will see the humor of the situation."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Merely that your wife is in Mr. Wendell's bedroom."

"My wife," he exclaimed.

"Ainslee, that is not true," cried Wendell, desperately.

"*O lé, O la!*" caroled Mrs. Dressler, deprecatingly. "I never lie," she went on, pointing to the door, "when it is so easy to prove the truth."

Ainslee strode forward. "Wendell," he demanded, "is my wife in that room?"

Wendell looked him full in the face.

"No, she is not," he said sullenly.

"Then prove it."

"Is not my word sufficient?"

"Not against mine," interrupted Renée, defiantly.

For a moment the two men stood

rigidly face to face. Nicholas Schuyler and Dressler came into the room and looked wonderingly from one to the other, not understanding the meaning of it all. Finally Ainslee, his face paling with anger, stepped toward Wendell.

"Wendell," he said, "open that door."

Wendell did not move. "I will not," he muttered, his face flushing hotly. "There is someone there—it is not Mrs. Ainslee. You can't compel me to compromise a woman."

Mrs. Dressler quietly picked up Margaret's cape and came toward Ainslee. "Not when the lady has already compromised herself?" she said, holding the cape before his eyes.

"Margaret's," he gasped. Then with an imprecation he advanced upon Wendell menacingly.

"Stand back!" he exclaimed.

"Never," said the artist, planting himself firmly before the door.

"By God, you shall!" cried Ainslee

seizing Wendell roughly by the arm and pushing him against the wall. The two men grappled, and Wendell struggled desperately to hold his ground; but Ainslee was by sheer weight forcing him gradually from the door, when the portiére was thrown back and Margaret walked calmly into the room.

VI

Grim and comfortless despair.
—*Comedy of Errors.*

Ainslee's hands dropped mechanically to his side. For a moment he stood gazing at his wife, completely bewildered. Her manner was so composed and defiant that even Renée Dressler was taken aback, while poor Wendell stared at her as though she were an apparition from the lower world.

"Margaret!" Ainslee gasped, when he had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to speak.

"Why not?" she answered coldly. "Does it surprise you?"

"Oh, dear, no," interrupted Renée Dressler, quickly. "One can never be surprised at anything nowadays."

Ainslee turned toward Wendell. "You shall answer for this," he said.

"When we settle accounts," replied Wendell, sternly, "the balance won't be on your side."

Nicholas Schuyler stepped between them. "Enough of this," he commanded. "Let her explain. I, for one, refuse to believe Margaret Ainslee ever did anything wrong."

"The lady is caught," sneered Renée Dressler, "in her admirer's room. Is any explanation necessary?"

"And you dare say that!" cried Margaret, her eyes glowing with anger. "*You!*"

"Certainly," answered Renée with a mock curtsy. "Can you deny it? Have we no eyes?"

"Isn't your anxiety to convict rather keen for a disinterested party?" interrupted Lady Coldstream. "How does this affair concern you?"

"Oh, merely as a friend of the family," returned Renée, with a deprecatory shrug.

"Well, deliver me from such a friend!" said Lady Coldstream, in disgust.

Ainslee turned toward his wife. "Margaret," he asked, his voice trembling as he spoke, "have you no explanation?"

"Yes," she answered, quickly, "if I choose to give it."

"My dear," interrupted Lady Coldstream, "remember the position you are in."

Margaret did not reply. For a moment she looked her husband full in the eyes.

"For God's sake, say something!" he said.

"I will," she answered, scornfully. "But remember that for your sake I was willing to be silent."

"For my sake?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I came here to meet you—and *her*. Now do you understand?"

Ainslee stared at her in astonishment. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that I saw your letter."

"Not a word!" whispered Renée aside to her husband. Dressler nodded knowingly.

"Have I said enough?" Margaret continued, "or shall I go on?"

"Go on, go on," Ainslee exclaimed —"if you know what you are talking about."

"Oh, you know what I mean," she said, angrily. "I found the letter you wrote Mrs. Dressler, telling her to meet you to-night. How unfortunate that N. W. did not go to the country!"

"Are you crazy?" he gasped, utterly unable to understand her meaning.

"Ask Mrs. Dressler where she left her muff this afternoon. The letter was in it, and I read it."

Nicholas Schuyler stepped forward quickly. "Schuyler," he said, angrily, "if this is true——"

"I tell you it isn't true," protested Ainslee, indignantly. "I have not written to Mrs. Dressler since my marriage. I came here, as you know, at Lady Coldstream's invitation."

"Oh! oh!" cried Margaret. "How dare you say that?"

"Very clever, Mrs. Ainslee," said

Renée Dressler. "Very well acted. But where is the letter?"

Margaret gave her enemy a withering glance. "You know perfectly well where it is," she answered.

Renée Dressler smiled. "My dear Mrs. Ainslee, since you see fit to accuse me in order to save yourself, I must tell you that you do not speak the truth. I have never, as your husband says, received any letter from him since his marriage."

Margaret grew very pale. "That is a lie!" she exclaimed.

Lady Coldstream seized Margaret's arm. "Margaret," she pleaded, "stop! You don't know what you are saying."

"I do know," she answered, slowly. "I say again that it's a lie."

Mrs. Dressler turned to Ainslee. "I appeal to you, Mr. Ainslee, to defend me," she implored.

Ainslee controlled his anger sufficiently to speak calmly. "Before you accuse others," he said to his wife, "re-

member your own position. You said you were too ill to leave the house, and I find you, alone, in the room of a man who was in love with you. I know positively he did not expect visitors. What is more, he denied you were there, and tried forcibly to prevent my finding you. Instead of explaining, you make ridiculous accusations which you cannot substantiate."

Margaret gazed at her husband in utter bewilderment. She could not believe he would be so base as to sacrifice her to save himself.

Wendell, who had been listening, attentively, finally resolved to assume the blame if the opportunity presented itself. From his point of view the entire affair was a conspiracy between Renée Dressler and Ainslee to compromise Margaret in order that suspicion might be diverted from themselves. This miserable cowardice was more than he could bear in silence.

"You know perfectly well why she is here," he said, suddenly, to Ainslee. "If

you are coward enough to protect yourself at her expense, I am not. You want me to acknowledge it, do you, so that you can go scot free? Very well, then; I do love your wife."

"Damn you!" responded Ainslee, hoarsely.

Nicholas Schuyler stepped before his nephew. "Stop, Schuyler," he warned; "you'll only demean yourself."

Margaret looked at Wendell hopelessly. "Norman," she uttered, in despair, "what have you said? What have you done?"

"The only thing possible."

She believed he had compromised her intentionally, to make the rupture with her husband complete. With a cry of pain she turned to Ainslee. "No! No!" she exclaimed; "it is not true. I tell you I am innocent!"

Ainslee turned his back without replying. In desperation she seized Nicholas Schuyler's arm. "You don't believe! Tell him you don't believe!"

"You have disgraced us all," Nicho-

las Schuyler said, coldly. "I am sorry that I lived to see it."

Wendell held out his arms appealingly. "Margaret," he said in a tone of despair.

"Don't speak to me!" she cried. "I hate you!"

He stared at her in dismay. She had killed the one hope that made life tolerable.

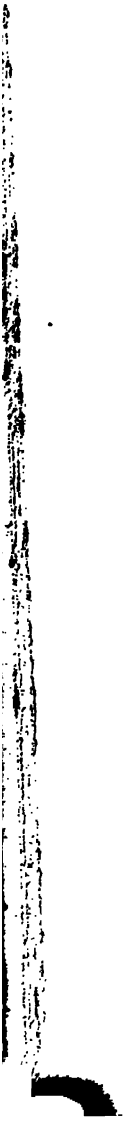
Nicholas Schuyler laid his arm gently upon his nephew's shoulder and led him slowly toward the door. "My poor boy!" he said. "My poor boy!"

When they had gone, Margaret staggered toward a chair and sank down, crushed and humiliated. The revenge of Renée Dressler had been complete.

Lady Coldstream took Margaret's hand quietly. "I never went back on a pal yet," she whispered, "and I won't begin now."

Margaret glanced up with a wild, appealing look, and pressed Lady Coldstream's hand gratefully to her heart.

"A very successful surprise party!" said Renée Dressler, cheerfully. "Lady Coldstream, I congratulate you!"



PART IV

ONE MORNING

I

You speak like a green girl.

—*Hamlet.*

When Lady Coldstream entered the library, on the following morning, her usually imperturbable disposition was visibly ruffled. Her first action was to ring the bell; then she walked to the table, and, taking up a morning paper, glanced over its columns nervously.

"Is it in the papers?" she said half-aloud. "Just like that Dressler woman to give it out!" Her eyes rested on a glaring headline. "Oh, I say," she exclaimed. "'Scandal in High Life—Rumors of a Divorce.'" After quickly scanning the article, she put the paper down with a sigh of relief. "No," she continued, "some other woman. Pretty, of course. The only consolation plain women have is being virtuous."

"Did your ladyship ring?" asked the servant who answered the bell.

"Yes," she said unfolding another paper with the thought that possibly its news-gatherers were more enterprising than those of the journal she had just inspected. "Is your master back yet?"

"No, my lady," replied the servant, with uncomprising gravity. "'E slept at the club. Horders came just now for the valet to take his things there."

"Oh!" said Lady Coldstream, with an inflection that might mean a great many things. "Has your mistress had breakfast?"

"Yes, my lady, but I'm afraid she's hill. The tray came down just now with nothink touched."

Lady Coldstream continued to scan the columns of her paper. After a moment's hesitation, the man made so bold as to interrupt. "I beg pardon, my lady," he said, apologetically, "but the lady's maid say the mistress do look 'orrible pale. Hought I to send for the doctor?"

"No," answered Lady Coldstream, with the domineering tone the English

employ toward servants. "You may go."

"Very good, my Lady."

"Fancy sending for a doctor!" she laughed when the man had disappeared. "A lawyer would be more to the point."

Lady Coldstream was not alone in her anxiety, for Eveline presently bustled into the room with an air of great excitement. She carried a large basket filled with envelopes stamped and addressed, which she was bearing hastily in the direction of the hall, when Lady Coldstream hailed her.

'I say, what's all that?" asked the English beauty, eyeing the basket of notes suspiciously.

"Don't bother me," answered Eveline, in a tone of great importance. "I'm recalling the invitations for the dance."

"What!" exclaimed Lady Coldstream, dropping her paper in astonishment. "Who told you to do that?"

"My own intelligence," replied the girl, with a defiant toss of her head. "You couldn't expect Cousin Margaret to consider such details after the scandal of last night?"

"Scandal! Child! there hasn't been any scandal."

"Oh, indeed!" answered Eveline, testily. "The wife is discovered by the husband in the rooms of her lover. If that isn't a scandal, what is?"

Lady Coldstream gasped for breath. "Well, 'pon my word!" she exclaimed, when she had recovered from her astonishment. "For little Miss Innocent, fresh from a convent, you're doing rather well."

"Of course, there'll be a duel," said Eveline, continuing her progress toward the hall. "How romantic! Quite like a French novel."

Lady Coldstream stepped forward and barred Eveline's route of egress. "And what do you know about French novels, pray?" she asked.

"Oh, I've read a lot," answered Eve-

line triumphantly. "A girl needs to know everything nowadays if she wants to get on."

"What you need is a good spanking."

Eveline glared at her resentfully. "You seem to forget I'm out," she exclaimed, drawing herself up to the commanding height of five feet three.

"Well," muttered Lady Coldstream, "you'd better go in again and stay in till you're ripe. As for these," she continued taking the basket of notes from Eveline's hands, "I'll take care of them. The dance will not be postponed—not if I can prevent it."

Without further ado she emptied the contents of the basket into the fire and walked calmly to the drawing-room, before the terrified Eveline could recover from her astonishment.

Eveline threw herself into a chair so energetically that she broke a spring.

"Nasty old thing!" she muttered. "How'd she like it if I told everybody

she rouges and bleaches her hair? I will, too!"

She might have formed even direr plans for vengeance on the recalcitrant beauty had not Dickie Willing meandered into the room with a consequential air, induced by the possession of a new suit of clothes from Sackville street.

"Good morning, Miss Crosspatch," he murmured, after tiptoeing lightly to a position of vantage behind her chair.

Eveline jumped to her feet. "What! you dare come here?" she said, with all the haughtiness she could command, which, to tell the truth, was not very much.

"Rather!" chuckled Dickie, gleefully, depositing his hat on the table and removing his gloves, with the evident intention of holding his ground. "Is the dance on or off?"

Eveline gave him a look of scorn. "Didn't I tell you never to speak to me again?" she demanded.

"That's why I'm doing it," he gurgled.

"Your impertinence is sublime."

"From the sublime to the ridiculous; it's up to you."

"*Indeed!*" she exclaimed, with a petulant shake of her pretty head that to Dickie was most alluring; but it required more courage to embrace that particular opportunity than even he possessed, especially as experience had taught him that girls resent being kissed before luncheon.

"I say," he said, appealingly, "let's make up."

"Not until you apologize for your unpardonable behavior of last night."

Eveline accompanied her words with a frown that Dickie evidently relished, for, instead of apologizing, he laughed.

"I love you," he said, when he had recovered from his merriment. "What more do you want?"

"Words, meaningless words," she answered, with a deprecatory wave of her little hand.

"Well, I like that, by Jove!" he whined. "Been off my feed for a month. Got so thin, clothes won't fit. Got to get a new kit. Damned expensive loving you."

"Such language to a lady!" Eveline exclaimed, indignantly.

"Apologize—didn't mean to swear—that is, anything but eternal devotion." Then an idea occurred to Dickie, "Perhaps you'd like me to do it up brown. Well, here goes!" Whereupon he dropped upon both knees with a thud that shook the house. But, unfortunately for his calculations, Lady Coldstream came into the room at that moment and was a witness to his intensity.

"Oh, Eveline, Eveline!" he pleaded, with arms extended, "say that you'll be mine!"

As Eveline was unquestionably on the point of wavering, Lady Coldstream thought it wise to prevent the appeal from becoming irresistible; so, coming forward with a cushion snatched

from a neighboring divan, she placed it carefully before the astonished Dickie.

"Allow me," she said. "You may find the floor a trifle hard."

Dickie cocked his head on one side and looked up at Lady Coldstream with a fetching smile. "Ha!" he chuckled. "Rather neat, what?"

Eveline, however, saw nothing humorous in the situation. "Perhaps, Mr. Willing," she said, sharply, as, with much difficulty, that irrepressible youth struggled to his feet, "you will be good enough to fulfil the object of your visit; the decorations are still incomplete, and"—with a chilling glance at the English beauty—"Lady Coldstream insists that the dance is on."

Having delivered this tirade with all the irony she could command, she turned haughtily on her heel and flounced out of the room.

Dickie followed meekly. When he reached the door he turned and winked at Lady Coldstream. "Oh, I am

enjoying myself," he murmured, as he disappeared behind the portiére.

"He's not such a fool as he looks," said Lady Coldstream, settling herself comfortably in an arm-chair. "But what are rich girls for, if it isn't to provide for poor young men?"

II

I appeal to your own conscience.
—*The Winter's Tale.*

Lady Coldstream's experience of the world had convinced her that there is a woman at the bottom of everything, be it good or bad, and it did not need a great deal of acumen to satisfy her that the source of all evil for the Ainslee family was Renée Dressler. Although intuition firmly convinced her that Margaret was innocent of any intrigue with Norman Wendell, she was as yet unable to divine a way out of the dilemma in which her friend had become involved. While carefully sifting the different circumstances of the case —so far as she understood them—with the hope of discovering a way to solve the mystery, she was interrupted by the entrance of Margaret herself. She was pale and careworn, and had evidently

passed a night of anguish. Lady Coldstream went toward her quickly.

"Mornin', dear. I hope you slept."

"I never closed my eyes," answered Margaret, wearily.

"Nonsense. You look fit as a fiddle," said Lady Coldstream, putting her arm about her waist and leading her toward a chair. With a sigh Margaret sank into the chair and looked up at her friend despondently.

"I shall never forget, dear, how good you were to me—never."

"I only stood by a pal—it's a poor sort who wouldn't."

"I don't know another woman who would."

"There, there," said Lady Coldstream, cheerfully. "This isn't the time for sentiment. We've got to pull you out of this mess before it's all over town. The first thing to do is to find Schuyler and tell him everything."

"Oh, he won't believe," said Margaret, bitterly. "He doesn't want to believe."

Lady Coldstream's face assumed an expression of disgust. "Now, what's the use of funking?" she protested.

"You heard what he said. He denied writing the letter, to—to save himself."

"Spoof! Schuyler isn't that sort."

"I tell you I read it," retorted Margaret. "I tell you I saw that woman in his arms."

"And he found you in Wendell's rooms," said Lady Coldstream, with uplifted brows. "Don't forget that."

Margaret sprang to her feet. "Don't speak of that man!" she cried, angrily.

Lady Coldstream looked at her and laughed. "Why not?" she asked, in an irritating way. "By your own confession you knew he was in love with you. Now, a tame cat is all very well, provided he's a cat, but when he happens to be a man, look out!"

"Oh, I admit I was wrong; but is that any excuse for him?"

"Men don't look for excuses; they look for opportunities."

"Well, he had his," said Margaret,

bitterly, "and he behaved like a cad."

"I'm not so sure of that," responded Lady Coldstream, with a doubtful shake of the head. "Take your own story. You went there to catch your husband and the Dressler woman. Common sense should have told you that was the last place in the world they would choose. Well, you didn't find them. You found Wendell and a supper party. Did you go home decently and say nothing about it? No; you poured forth your tale of woe to a man you knew was in love with you, and he promptly offered to console you—just as any self-respecting lover would."

Lady Coldstream paused. Margaret was looking out of the window with a hopeless, woe-begone expression in her eyes. The beauty smiled to herself.

"Did you rise in your wrath and indignation?" she continued. "Did you call for help? No; you meekly told him to wait until to-morrow, and when you heard some one coming you lost your

head completely and fled to his bedroom. He lost his head, too, but he lied like a gentleman. Then, when you were caught, and nobody believed your story, did he run to cover? No; he stood up to it like a man. If you'd been even half in love with him you'd have fallen into his arms on the spot and taken the next steamer for the South of France."

"The one man," said Margaret, regretfully, "I thought I could trust. How I have been deceived in him!"

"Yes," replied Lady Coldstream, "it's the clever women who are taken in by men—it's the silly women who take men in."

Margaret turned away from the window.

"Oh, I know I've been a fool," she said.

"Well, we won't argue that point."

Lady Coldstream heard a step behind her and looked up. Ainslee had entered the room quietly, and was gazing at his wife. Margaret turned and met her

husband's eyes. For a moment they stared at each other coldly.

Lady Coldstream looked first at one and then at the other. "Well," she asked, finally, with a desire to relieve the situation, "shall I leave you?"

"If you will," said Ainslee. "I wish to speak to Margaret alone."

"No, no, Muriel," protested Margaret; "don't go! I prefer you to hear."

"As you please," said Lady Coldstream, resuming her seat.

Ainslee took a step toward his wife, then hesitated. He was haggard and careworn, and was evidently struggling to control his emotions.

"Well," said Margaret, "I am waiting."

"Margaret," he said, drawing a hand wearily across his eyes, "all last night I walked the streets trying to find some justification for you. Even if what you suspected were true, is that any excuse for you?"

"If you are here to upbraid me—" she protested.

"No; I leave that to your own conscience."

Margaret's face flushed angrily. "When you are ready to beg forgiveness for your insults," she said, "I will listen."

He started to reply, but she turned away abruptly and walked out of the room.



III

Give him this letter; do it secretly.
—*The Merchant of Venice.*

When Ainslee had recovered from his astonishment at Margaret's extraordinary behavior, he turned to Lady Coldstream.

"I beg forgiveness of her?" he said, in amazement.

Lady Coldstream looked at him and laughed. "My dear boy," she replied, "there are two kinds of fools—those who are born so, and those who make fools of themselves. You belong to the latter class."

"You take her part, of course!" he retorted.

"Rather, when you aren't sportsman enough to ride straight."

"I?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

Lady Coldstream calmly lighted a

cigarette before replying. "Oh, the usual domestic drama," she said, as she blew out the match. "The frisky husband and the wicked lady."

"Go on—play your part—you've got it pat enough."

Lady Coldstream made rings of smoke. "Naturally, the wife is jealous," she continued, regardless of his irony. "Was there ever a woman who was not? When she catches the husband with the lady in his arms he tries to deny it. Was there ever a man who wouldn't?"

"Yes," he said, impatiently, "the trick of an unscrupulous woman."

"Circumstantial evidence, however; many a man has been hung on that."

Ainslee walked back and forth excitedly. "I told Margaret the truth," he protested. "She refused to believe."

"Naturally," observed his companion, dryly. "When she finds a letter making a date with the lady."

"There is no such letter!" he exclaimed.

"Beg pardon, there *is* such a letter."

He stopped suddenly and looked Lady Coldstream in the eyes. "Do you mean to tell me that Margaret is innocent?" he asked.

"Rather! I'd stake my last penny on it."

"Then prove it," he said, earnestly. "God knows I want to believe it!"

Lady Coldstream gave him a look of disgust. "Why, man," she replied, "her own words prove it. Guilty women don't stand up and accuse—they get down on their knees and beg."

For a moment Ainslee stared vacantly at the floor; then he drew his hand across his eyes as if he were trying to gather his thoughts. "Oh, if I could believe it!" he said. "You don't know what tortures I went through last night. I was mad, Muriel, raving mad! There was nothing I couldn't have done. Then, somehow, I began to think of the men here in New York whose lives had been wrecked like mine. The divorce court—that is their story. One poor

fellow went to France and fought; another killed himself. It made me willing to give her one more chance. That was why I came to-day—for the sake of the future—for the sake of my name. And she refused to listen."

"Can't you see she believes you guilty?"

"Guilty?" he exclaimed, turning toward her in astonishment. "Why, Renée Dressler played me that trick because I refused what most men would have jumped at."

"Yes," remarked Lady Coldstream, airily, "she has played you from the word *go*."

This irony was lost on Ainslee. His mind was too much occupied with his own misery.

"And I tried to be square. I made her give me back the letters I wrote her before I was married, and I burned them there," he said, pointing to the fireplace. "Does that sound like playing fast and loose?"

He stopped suddenly. "Wait," he

said, hurriedly realizing the events of the previous day. "Could it have been one of those letters?"

"Oho!" muttered Lady Coldstream, "a bit of daylight at last."

Ainslee plunged his hands into his pockets and paced the floor thoughtfully. "Yes," he said, "I did write such a letter—once—but she was out of town. Heaven knows what might have happened otherwise!"

"I say," interrupted Lady Coldstream, impatiently, "are you going to drivel over the past, or are you going to do something? You've got to explain that letter—it's your only chance."

"Easily said, but how?"

"Make her tell, even if you have to make love to her."

He turned toward her quickly. "By Jove!" he exclaimed; "an idea!"

"Well it's about time."

"Yes, it may work," he said, going to the writing table. Seizing a pen, he wrote a hurried note, while Lady Coldstream watched him curiously out of

the corner of her eye. When he had finished the missive he blotted it carefully, directed an envelope, and then handed it to her for perusal.

"There, that may do it," he said, touching the bell for a servant.

Lady Coldstream took the letter and read as follows:

"My Dear Dressler:

"Your wife has a letter I wrote her some months ago. If you will get it, bring her here immediately, and induce her to tell the truth; I will cancel your note and waive the interest.

"Yours truly,
"Schuyler Ainslee."

"Oh, I see," she said, as she handed back the letter. "Hush money."

"Not quite so bad as that," he answered, putting the letter in the envelope and sealing it carefully. "I was rather in love with Renée Dressler once, and when Dressler asked for a loan—well, he got it. The fellow is an all-around cad."

"If he does what you ask," remarked

his companion, indignantly, "he's an out-and-out 'rotter.'"

Without replying, Ainslee turned to the servant who had answered the bell and handed him the letter. "Take that note to Mr. Dressler," he said. "Hand it to him yourself. If he is out, bring it back. Under no circumstances give it to anyone else."

When the man had gone he turned to Lady Coldstream. "Muriel," he said, "until I knew Margaret I never took love seriously. It was a game of chance, and it didn't much matter with whom I played."

"Yes," she grunted, sententiously; "I've known men before with hearts like a hand-organ—a tune for every street."

"Oh, it's been a lesson to me," he said, despondently.

"And to her, too," replied Lady Coldstream, drily.

A footman entered the room and handed Ainslee a card. He glanced at it carelessly, then started.

"Muriel, look!" he exclaimed, handing the card to his companion. She read the name. It was "Mr. Norman Wendell."

"Whom did he ask for?" she asked the man.

"For Mr. Ainslee, my Lady."

"For me?" exclaimed Ainslee, in astonishment.

"Why not?" said Lady Coldstream. "The morning's the sweet time for repentance." Turning to the man, she ordered him to show in Mr. Wendell.

"Do nothing of the kind," Ainslee commanded.

"Show him in," she repeated, emphatically. The footman was in a quandary, but, inspired by the awe of the nobility which is inborn in every Briton's heart, he hastily proceeded to execute Lady Coldstream's command.

"Muriel," protested Ainslee, "I will not see him."

"You've got to see him," she said, rising from her chair. "You know

something—he knows the rest. Hear what he has to say. When you have put two and two together, I'll wager you'll say 'Forgive me, old chap; we've both been wrong!'"

"Not until he proves he isn't a blackguard," he muttered.

"Keep your temper, dear boy," said Lady Coldstream, sweetly. Hearing Wendell's step, she hastily beat a retreat.

"In case you need a lawyer, I'll be in there," she continued, in a whisper, pointing to the drawing-room.



IV

What proof shall I make of that?
—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

Ainslee turned and bowed stiffly as Wendell entered the room. For a moment the two men faced each other in silence. Ainslee was the first to speak.

"May I inquire the reason for this visit?" he asked, coldly.

"Ainslee," said Wendell, struggling to control his emotion, "I can't let this affair go any further without an explanation. I'm not here to defend myself; you and I have a long score to settle, but I want to tell you, on my honor, that your wife is innocent."

"Why, man, you confessed!" exclaimed Ainslee, in surprise.

"Oh, I don't take back what I said; I love Margaret—you know that perfectly well. But I've been straight

with you. I kept my word until you broke yours. When she came there last night I don't think she even suspected what was in my heart. I tell you, she is true as steel. It's more than you deserve."

Ainslee looked at him searchingly. "Then why was she in your room?" he asked.

"She found your letter. She came to confront you and Renée Dressler."

"Then why did you lie to me?"

"Because she was caught like a rat in a trap, and when she told the truth you were coward enough to save yourself."

Ainslee gazed at the floor thoughtfully. For a moment he did not reply.

"Wendell," he said, finally, looking his enemy straight in the eye, "if you think I wrote such a letter—if you believe——"

"I saw with my own eyes," broke in Wendell. "I heard——"

"You saw a clever woman play a bold game to get even with me for refusing

to be her monkey-on-a-chain. If you had waited you would have heard the truth."

"But, man, your letter!" cried Wendell.

"Is one I wrote months ago, before I was married—if there *is* such a letter."

"Ainslee," asked Wendell, "is this true?"

"I give you my word of honor."

"Then I have misjudged you."

Ainslee came toward him quickly. "You said she was innocent; now prove it."

"What! You love her?" said Wendell, in astonishment.

"Love her! I'd give my life to save her this disgrace."

Wendell looked at him in silence, not knowing what to think.

"Why do you stare like that?" exclaimed Ainslee. "You are concealing something. Tell me the truth—every word of it."

"Then send for her," said Wendell, quietly.

"For Margaret?"

"Yes. I wish to prove what I say in a way that will leave no doubt in your mind. You don't know what it will cost me—but you will be satisfied."

Ainslee drew back in surprise "I don't understand," he said.

"Send for Margaret," repeated Wendell. "When she comes," he continued, pointing to the drawing-room, "listen there to what I have to say."

"No," said Ainslee, firmly, "I am no eavesdropper."

"If you value your happiness, do as I say. Only promise me not to interrupt, no matter what you hear."

Wendell was so thoroughly in earnest that Ainslee wavered. He had tried in vain to fathom the mystery of Margaret's conduct. Now he felt it his duty to leave no stone unturned to satisfy himself of her innocence.

"Well, he said, finally, "I promise."

"Schuyler," said Wendell, turning toward him suddenly, "if you'd been frank with me last night this would not

have happened. Remember that, won't you?"

Ainslee looked at him in surprise. "Yes," he said; "but I don't understand."

"You will, soon enough. Now, quick—get Margaret."

Ainslee turned and walked to the door of the drawing-room. "Muriel!" he called, "Muriel!"

"Yes," said Lady Coldstream, faintly, from behind the portiére.

"Will you send Margaret here?" he continued. "Don't let her know that I want her, or that Mr. Wendell is here. Make any excuse you can."

"I understand."

Wendell waited until he heard Lady Coldstream's step in the hall beyond.

"Did she hear?" he asked.

"But for her I should have refused to see you," said Ainslee. "She's been a trump from the start."

"Don't let her hear now."

"Well, as you please," and Ainslee walked away abruptly and entered the

drawing-room. As he drew the portiére he felt like a culprit for playing the spy, but he hoped and prayed it was for the best.

Wendell walked back and forth, anxiously waiting for Margaret. "If I had only known," he said. "If I had only known!"

Finally Margaret entered the room, unsuspectingly. She had been told that Nicholas Schuyler had called, in the hope of effecting a reconciliation. There are times when it is a sin to tell the truth, and Lady Coldstream was convinced that this was one of them.

Margaret saw Wendell and drew back. "*YOU!*" she said, in surprise.

"Yes," he answered, coming toward her quickly.

"Why are you here?" she asked, almost harshly.

"For my answer."

"Your answer?"

"You said 'Until to-morrow.' Is it to be always 'Until to-morrow'?"

She colored angrily and turned away. "Last night," she said, "I was charitable enough to think you mad. If you had any heart you would go."

"No, no," he cried, passionately. "I cannot go—I love you—I love you! You are my paradise, my torment!"

"Don't, don't," she exclaimed, drawing back in fright. "Can't you see it is useless? Are you blind?"

"Yes, blind! I see only you."

"Go, go," she cried, "Show some pity, and go."

He was acting a mean part, knowing full well that she would hate him for the sacrifice he was making, but there was bitter truth in every word he spoke. "You are mine; by every right on earth!" he cried.

"Because he forgets I am his wife?" she said indignantly.

"His wife!" he laughed.

"Stop," she commanded. "Because I told you my wretched story—because I trusted you—have you the right to insult me?"

"Is it an insult to think, to dream, to feel only you?"

"And I believed you were my friend!" she said, bitterly. "Can any woman make a man her friend?"

"No. Not the man who loves her with every fibre of his heart," he cried, grasping her wrists.

"Oh, oh," she pleaded, struggling to release herself. "If you had any sense of honor!"

"Listen, Margaret," he whispered, passionately. "What is left except my love?"

"You coward!" she said, throwing him aside with all her strength.

For a moment he stood looking at her. He thought she had never been so beautiful before.

"So this is the end!" he said at last. "You would have married me once—and now when you are free you will not listen." He took a step toward her quickly. "Answer me," he said. "I have a right to know. Is it because you love *him?*"

"Yes," she said, looking him firmly in the eyes, "because I love *him*."

Wendell strode swiftly toward the drawing-room. "Schuyler," he shouted, "Schuyler! Did you hear?"

Ainslee threw aside the curtain and came toward him excitedly. "If I had known the price you meant to pay—" he began.

"Ah, Schuyler," answered Wendell. "there has never been a moment when it was not you. Down on your knees and beg forgiveness."

Without a word Ainslee approached his wife and held out his hands appealingly. "Margaret," he said, "forgive me. You said you would listen when I could beg forgiveness."

Margaret drew back, her cheeks burning. "So you set a trap for me—you played the spy! It was mean—it was cruel!"

"It was I, Margaret," interposed Wendell. "I begged him to listen. Think what I said to him last night!"

She did not answer. She could not find it in her heart to answer.

"You have proved your innocence," Wendell said. "But what must he think of me?" There was despair in his tone.

Ainslee grasped his hand. "I wish I had half your courage," he said.

Wendell looked up gratefully. He felt the sacrifice had not been in vain.

Lady Coldstream came into the room quietly, and stood for a moment waiting. Finally Ainslee turned to his wife.

"Forgive me!" he said. It was love for you that made me doubt."

"Forgive you? No. Not until you show me that I can forgive. I need proof as well as you. Why don't you set a trap for her and let me play the spy?"

She turned away to go.

Lady Coldstream stepped before her. "For shame, Margaret! It's a woman's duty to forgive."

Margaret threw her arms about Lady

Coldstream's neck and buried her face on her shoulder.

"I—I can't, Muriel," she cried. "They have killed what little heart was left."



V

Forgive him! and forgive us all.
—*Measure for Measure.*

Lady Coldstream was convinced that half the battle had been fought and won, but she was not at all certain about the outcome of the other half, for Renée Dressler was yet to be explained. Fortunately for the success of her schemes, the butler entered the room at the very moment when she was most at a loss for a plan of campaign, and gravely heralded the arrival of "Mr. and Mrs. Dressler."

At the sound of those detested names, Margaret turned toward her husband. "That creature dares come here?" she exclaimed.

"Hush!" said Lady Coldstream, quickly, placing a finger over her lips to enjoin caution. "Your cue is silence."

Renée Dressler's reception was not of the most cordial nature. Lady Coldstream and Ainslee bowed coldly, while Margaret turned her back abruptly. Renée saw, however, by Wendell's presence, and the worried expression on the faces about her, that she had interrupted the domestic drama at an inopportune moment, and this conclusion aroused a smile of satisfaction.

"What a charming funeral!" she said, with an amused glance about the room. "Is one expected to send flowers?"

The chilliness of the atmosphere, however, was in no wise tempered by this remark.

"Have you got it?" Ainslee whispered hastily, to Dressler.

Dressler placed a letter quietly in Ainslee's hand. "I found it in her desk," he said, keeping an eye on the movements of his wife. "If she won't tell the truth, I will."

"I seem to be the corpse," remarked Renée Dressler, after several futile

attempts to gain recognition for herself.

"Not yet," said Lady Coldstream, in a manner that foreboded evil.

"Oh, really!" replied Renée, defiantly. "I'll die hard, you'll find."

"A cat usually has nine lives," remarked Lady Coldstream *sotto voce* to Wendell.

Renée Dressler began to suspect that Monty had been up to some deviltry.

"You asked my husband to bring me here," she said to Margaret, suddenly. "Well?"

"I?" exclaimed Margaret, in surprise.

"My wife," interrupted Ainslee, quickly, "wishes you to explain the circumstances connected with this letter."

He quietly took the letter Monty had given him from its envelope and held it before her eyes. But she was equal to the occasion.

"Oh," she said, after a careless glance at the writing, "the letter you wrote me yesterday."

"Then you *did* receive a letter yes-

terday?" said Lady Coldstream, pointedly.

For a moment Ainslee was disconcerted by the audacity of her defense, but he recovered himself quickly.

"There is no date," he said, examining the letter carefully. "Are you quite sure yesterday was not a year ago?"

Renée looked at him with an expression of surprise. "Oh, how stupid of me!" she said, with feigned naiveté. "If I'd only known the story you meant to tell! Well, I've done it—we may as well face the music."

"Very clever, very clever," answered Ainslee, quietly. "But, if you do not care to tell the truth, I think your husband will spare you the trouble."

"What! Monty tell the truth!" she laughed sarcastically. "I adore new sensations."

"My dear," said her husband, in a careless way that augured trouble, "when you returned Mr. Ainslee the letters he wrote you before his marriage, this one was overlooked. I found

it, and, as it bears no date, and might be misconstrued, I took the liberty of returning it myself."

"Fool!" she hissed, under her breath.

A quiet smile of satisfaction crossed Monty's lips. "Oh, I'm not sure of that," he said. "Mr. Ainslee appreciates my kindness so thoroughly that you ought to share my gratitude."

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously and turned away.

"Well," she muttered, "as you have made it a matter of business."

"One moment, my dear," he answered, stepping quickly before her and barring her way. "Is what I say true, or do you prefer a scandal?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she laughed scornfully. "Scandals are so common nowadays that I couldn't even become a sensation."

"Then you acknowledge I speak the truth?"

"My dear, your reputation for veracity is such that I wouldn't attempt to contradict you."

Ainslee had been struggling to control his anger, but it broke forth at last. "Then tell my wife," he cried, "that what she saw yesterday was a damnable trick played by you in a moment of pique."

"Don't Schuyler," protested Renée, "you know I hate heroics."

"Tell her the truth," he commanded.

"When you refrain from talking long enough to give me the opportunity."

She turned to Margaret.

"My dear Mrs. Ainslee," she said, "you really ought to exhibit your husband under glass. A man who loves his wife is such a curiosity that the public ought not to be deprived of the pleasure of seeing one."

Margaret had listened in silence to all that had been said. The anger in her heart had slowly given place to hope, until finally she realized that she had been the victim of a cowardly revenge.

"Mrs. Dressler," she said, haughtily, "I thank you for your sincerity. I wish I could forgive your cruelty."

For a moment Renée forgot the part she was acting. "You see the husband I have," she said. "Can you blame me for envying you yours?" It was only a momentary glimpse of the woman beneath the mask, but it was enough to tell the story of a life, for women are usually what men make them—tender creatures of sentiment, or devils.

Renée regretted what she had said, for the old reckless look came into her eyes, and her lip curled contemptuously. "You really must excuse me," she continued, quickly. "I'm lunching out."

She put out her hand, but her cruelty was more than Margaret could forgive. Renée shrugged her shoulders and glanced about the room defiantly.

"Good morning, everybody," she said. Ainslee and Wendell looked the other way. Lady Coldstream turned her back.

"I see," she continued, as a parting shaft, "that the manners of good society are becoming quite as bad as the morals."

Beaten, but not humiliated, she turned away, and walked slowly out of the room, her head held high in defiance, and her eyes flashing contempt for the world that had turned its back upon her. When she had gone Dressler quietly touched Ainslee's arm.

"How about—? you know," he said, suggestively.

"This afternoon, at my office," Ainslee replied, shortly.

Dressler smiled, and nodded familiarly to Margaret and Lady Coldstream. "Good morning, ladies," he said, walking toward the door. "Hope you don't mind my hurrying. The missis'll give me the deuce if I keep her waiting."

When Lady Coldstream heard his step in the hall she turned to Wendell. "'Pon my word," she exclaimed, "there's a brace of birds for you."

"Vultures!" commented Wendell, vigorously.

Eveline came rushing into the room, dragging Dickie Willing after her.

"Cousin Margaret," she called, "we —we're engaged."

"Ha! Rather neat, what?" chuckled Dickie.

The moment for the promulgation of this startling news was not opportune, and nobody realized this so thoroughly as Lady Coldstream. Before Eveline could recover from the astonishment caused by the frigid reception of the announcement that she had selected a partner for life, Lady Coldstream seized her by the hand and dragged her forcibly out of the room.

"Who cares if you are engaged?" she said. "Come, this is no place for you."

Dickie followed meekly. "Oh, I am enjoying myself," he muttered, as he went.

When Lady Coldstream and her charges had disappeared, Margaret and Ainslee looked at each other. They both felt very foolish, and for a moment neither had the courage to speak. Ainslee, however, finally

stepped forward manfully and assumed the burden of blame.

"Margaret," he said, "can you forgive?"

"Oh, Schuyler, I've been such a fool!" she cried, burying her face on his shoulder.

For the moment they forgot poor Wendell. He stood there alone, gazing at the last act of a comedy in which he had played the only mournful rôle. The sight of their happiness affected him profoundly. Dazed and unnerved, he turned away.

Ainslee looked up suddenly. "Why, Norman, old man," he said, "you're not going?"

"Yes, I'm going."

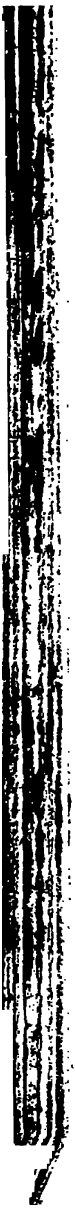
"But where?" asked Margaret, cheerfully.

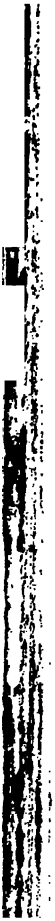
"God knows!"

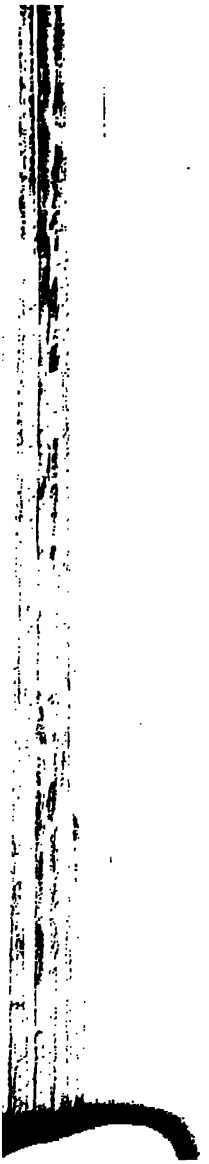
THE END.

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